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Adventures of two brothers

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"WHERE IS BEN?"

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ADVENTURES
OF
TWO BROTHERS.

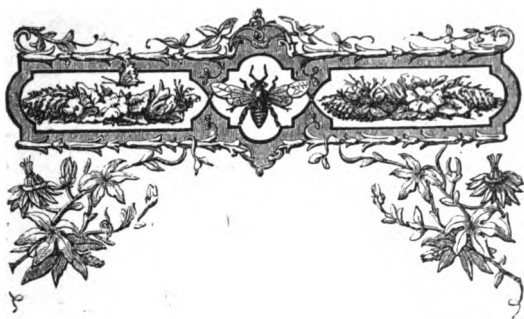
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ADVENTURES OF TWO BROTHERS.

CHAPTER I.

PRIORY FARM AND ITS OCCUPANTS.



It was a fine calm evening in early spring ; the setting sun brightened up the mossy banks and budding hedges of the Priory Farm. Outside the old-fashioned house all nature breathed an air of peaceful tranquillity ; but within was sadness and sorrow, for Matthew Clare, the owner of Priory

Farm, lay dying.

In a visit of Christian sympathy to the sick room of a poor cottager he had taken the infection of a virulent disease, and had rapidly sunk under its influence.

"Is there no hope—none?" ejaculated Matthew Clare's old housekeeper, as the village surgeon left the house and slowly mounted his horse, which for upwards of an hour had been standing at the door.

The doctor shook his head. "It will soon be over," he said. "I shall return presently, but—"

The woman burst into loud sobs, and inquired whether nothing could be done to avert the threatened calamity.

"Nothing," replied the doctor; "we have done all that it was possible to do, and now I can hold out no hope."

The ploughman and the shepherd were lingering near, and again, as he rode away, had the surgeon to announce his conviction that the ownership of the Priory Farm would, ere morning, pass away from Matthew Clare. As they heard it the rough labourers drew their hard brown hands across their eyes, and turning away to hide their emotion, went slowly back to their work.

Again and again, as he hastened homewards

through the village, was the doctor's course arrested ; and after each repetition of his unwelcome verdict, the heavy looks and moistened cheeks he left behind him told how Matthew Clare was beloved.

And now we will explain who Matthew Clare was, and what had caused him to be so universally respected that the anticipation of his decease should cause dismay and sorrow to all who heard of the critical position in which he lay.

For many years Mr. Clare had been the owner of the Priory Farm ; it was only a small freehold, but it was large enough, and well worked and remunerative enough, to satisfy the requirements of its possessor, who, being a man of frugal habits, and one who managed his affairs with strict economy, was able to make a tolerable living where some of his more improvident neighbours would have fallen into poverty.

Although Matthew Clare was thrifty and frugal, he could not be accused of meanness, and many of his poorer neighbours could have told of acts of charity and deeds of kindness that redounded greatly to his honour. Besides this, in all his transactions he was remarkable for his integrity and uprightness, and so ex-

cellent was his character as a man of business, that his word had the weight of an affirmation, and his promise was reckoned as good as another man's bond.

But though so generally respected, Matthew's lot was not all sunshine. To say nothing of petty vexations, of which, doubtless, he had his share, one deep sorrow had befallen him during his residence at the Priory. His wife, the partner of his happiness and cares, and the object of his intense affection, was taken away by a sudden stroke.

Later on, another source of anxious care had been added to his abiding grief. The same day that had deprived him of his loving wife had entailed upon him the charge of an infant son. "His name shall be Ichabod," said Matthew, in the first transport of his grief, "for my glory is departed." But calmer thoughts succeeded, and, in token of his resignation, he called his child Benjamin—the child of my right hand.

But Benjamin had grown up to boyhood and youth to awaken the anxieties of his father; he was wild and wilful, and ready at any time to set at nought the authority of those whom he ought to have loved and respected. In a certain impulsive manner he

loved his father and his elder brother Luke ; but, perhaps through having been indulged and petted as a child, he grew self-willed and rebellious, and thus became a source of sorrow and trouble to his parent, who loved him perhaps too fondly.

Now, when Benjamin realised the fact that ere long his father would be taken from him, he thought with regret of the trouble he had caused him, and in the transport of his grief would willingly have given his own life to save his father's.

Abandoning himself to the wildness of his uncontrolled passions, he had cast himself upon his father's couch, and was by turns entreating his parent in piteous tones *not to die*, and then uttering reproaches against the God of heaven for visiting him with this overwhelming sorrow.

In vain did his brother Luke strive to check him ; he was unreasoning in his grief.

"Leave me alone," he exclaimed. "If you loved him as I do you would feel as I do, but you—"

A feeble sigh from the father interrupted the reproaches of the younger and the remonstrances of the elder brother. For some time he had been heavily dozing, but now he

opened his eyes to the renewed consciousness which sometimes precedes the immediate approach of death.

He beckoned to his sons, and taking the hand of each, he poured out, in the fervid eloquence of a heart habituated to commune with God, a father's last prayer.

"Leave me now for a few minutes, Luke," he said. "I have something to say to Benjamin *alone*."

Luke obeyed, and the chamber door was closed upon Matthew and his younger son. The few minutes passed away, and the elder brother was summoned, also alone, to the bedside of his father.

"Luke," said the dying man, "I had something to say to you about worldly affairs, but I need not. You will find my will yonder"—pointing to a desk—"and I know you will do justly. It is not much that you will inherit, but you will find it all out when I am gone. But it is not about this I want to speak now," Matthew continued ; "it is about your brother, poor Ben."

"Yes, father," said Luke, subduing with a strong effort his rising emotion.

"He is not what he ought to be," the old man went on. "He is not what he might

have been, perhaps, had I not too fondly loved him. He has been 'left to himself,' poor boy ; but you will bear with him, Luke—you will do all you can to put him right. I know you will ; for my sake you will do this."

"Yes, yes, dear father ; you may safely leave him to me."

"Whatever trouble he may cause you, you will never give him up?"

"Never, father ; I *promise* you this."

"And his eternal interests, Luke?"

"I will pray for him, father, and I will try to guide him aright. I will do all I can—"

A movement of his father caused Luke to cease speaking, and in a moment he found that the old man had fallen into a state of unconsciousness. From this state he never rallied, and before morning the doctor's gloomy predictions were fulfilled ; Matthew Clare had ceased to breathe.

A few days afterwards his body was laid in the village graveyard, followed thither by the grief-stricken brothers and a long train of sorrowing villagers, to whom he had endeared himself by many a neighbourly act of kindness and charity.

CHAPTER II.

GOING WRONG.

AFTER the funeral of Matthew Clare the business of the farm was carried on under the direction of Luke, to whom the father's property had been left in trust until Benjamin should come of age, when it was to be equally divided between the brothers.

One of the executors of Matthew Clare's will was a brother farmer, living near, who took a great deal of interest in the young Clares, and by his judicious advice and friendly counsel helped Luke very considerably in the management of his farm.

Luke was thankful to have the aid thus given him by Mr. Edwards, but Benjamin, always fiery and impetuous, resented, as impertinent interference, the kindly and well-meant assistance of their late father's old friend.

"What right has he to presume to dictate to us?" he said, one day, as the kindly old farmer drove away. "I cannot understand how it is, Luke, that you allow it."

In vain did the elder brother point out the

benefit that was likely to accrue to them from following Mr. Edwards's advice ; his words were met only with scorn ; and Benjamin declared that when he came of age, and had his full share of the management of the farm, he would have no more of such interference.

"But I can guess why it is you submit to it," he continued. "You may try to keep me in the dark, but do you think I cannot see the reason?"

"I have no reason, except that I find Mr. Edwards's advice valuable, and it is for your good as well as my own, Ben, that I am glad to take it. As for keeping you in the dark about anything, you know I don't try to do that ; you have as much to do with the books and—"

"Ah, yes, I don't mean about the books," replied Benjamin ; "but don't you think every one can see that you are keeping in with old Edwards so that you may be able to make a match with his daughter?"

"You are mistaken, Ben ; I have never thought of such a thing, and you have no right to say so," answered Luke. But the colour that rushed to his face when his brother mentioned Bertha Edwards seemed to indicate that the shaft, shot perhaps at ran-

dom, had not been far from hitting the mark.

"I suppose when you get a wife," continued Benjamin, not heeding his brother's words, "you will be for keeping me out of the farm ; you will want it all to yourself ; but you must remember that in another year I shall have as much right to it as you."

"And your right will never be disputed, Ben. How can you be so unjust as to think of my disputing it?"

"Thanks to father for making his will so plain," was the ungracious rejoinder.

With a brother so unreasoning and unkind, it may well be imagined that Luke had enough to try his patience ; but he never forgot the promise he had given to his dying father, to do all he could for the temporal and spiritual well-being of Benjamin. It was well for Luke, and his brother too, that the former was a true and consistent Christian, for had it been otherwise it is probable that the conduct of Benjamin would have led to an open rupture between the brothers.

One of the results of the conversation just recorded was an important one to Luke. It opened his eyes to the fact, which he had never before dared to admit to himself, that Bertha

Edwards was very dear to him. But although Luke made this discovery he was careful not to reveal it to any one, and especially to the object of his affections. "I will wait," he said to himself with a sigh—"I will wait until Ben is of age, and we can come to some settlement about the future ; but what arrangement is to be made I cannot see yet. Poor Ben," he added, "I wish he was a little steadier and not so hasty ; but, whatever he is, I will never break my promise, even if I have to give up my dearest hopes." It was not without an effort that Luke could bring himself to this decision ; but having made it, he courageously and manfully adhered to it.

Months passed by, and Benjamin seemed to get more and more careless ; he seldom did any of the work on the farm, but spent his time in gratifying his desire for pleasure, if indeed pleasure is to be found in dissipation and riotous living.

In vain his elder brother endeavoured by kindness and persuasion to wean him from his profligacy. He pointed out to him the ruin which must inevitably follow the course he was pursuing, and showed that the ruin, when accomplished, would fall with equal force on both. The wilful young man took

no heed of his brother's counsels, but treated them with contempt.

"You must pay your brother all that is due to him when he comes of age," advised Mr. Edwards, "but unless he turns over a new leaf you will not be justified in doing more. If he goes on as he is he will bring you to poverty."

"He is my brother," Luke answered, "and I promised father always to look after him. I cannot break my word."

"You have done all you can, Luke," answered the farmer, "and far more than most brothers would have done. I was in hopes," he continued, "of seeing you settle down quietly at the old farm, and make a home for your wife, for I suppose you will be getting a wife some day."

"I don't know," said Luke; "not yet, at any rate. I must wait."

"You must not get cast down, Luke," Mr. Edwards said; "but I think you are getting over-anxious. You used to come and see us oftener than you do. Why don't you come now?"

Little did Mr. Edwards know that it was not from choice, but from a sense of duty, that Luke had become a less frequent visitor at

the Hall Farm. Little did he guess the effort it had cost the young farmer to keep away as he had lately done. If he had guessed it, and known the reason, his respect for Luke would have been none the less.

There was another besides Mr. Edwards who missed Luke's company at the Hall Farm. This was none other than Bertha Edwards. If any one had told her a few months before how much she depended on meeting the young farmer, and how much pleasure she derived from his presence, the probability is she would have been inclined to deny it ; but now that he so seldom came, and, when he did, was so reserved and apparently shy, she discovered that there had been a charm in his society which was none the less because it had not been fully recognised until it was withdrawn.

It is truly said that no man can live to himself. His conduct, whether it be good or evil, will and must, to a greater or less degree, influence those around him. The man whose conduct and life are such as becomes the true Christian is—unconsciously, it may be—exercising a power for good. Others are made happier by him, and he becomes a blessing to all around, and thus is making use

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of the talent with which his Lord has entrusted him. He may have long to wait before he sees any fruit springing from the seed he has sown, or he may *never* see it in this life ; but if he earnestly perseveres in the right, and prayerfully strives to do his duty, he will at last hear the voice of the Master saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

On the other hand, the evil example of the irreligious and profligate is almost certain to bear speedy and bitter fruit. Bad habits and "little sins" soon increase in strength and magnitude, and, unless overcome, are certain to involve the person who indulges in them in trouble and sorrow, and, alas ! too often bring grief and pain to others. It is easy to set the stone rolling down hill, but not so easy to stop it in its course when it is once in motion. Benjamin Clare found this to be the case. He was not so utterly hardened as to be entirely regardless of the trouble he caused his brother, and sometimes in his better moments determined to live a less selfish life ; but the stone was rolling, and his efforts to stop it were ineffectual. His evil courses not

only continued, but increased, and ere he had reached the age of legal manhood he was old in vice and folly, and was bringing trouble and sorrow upon the brother who was ready to devote himself to the enhancement of his interests and happiness.

Little did Matthew Clare know what a charge he was giving to Luke when he besought him to study his brother's interests as his own.

CHAPTER III.

AN OUTBURST.

IT was a lovely autumn day. The corn was all cut, and a great deal of it carried and stacked. Luke Clare and his men were hard at work striving to clear the last field of its yellow grain before the night came on. But the crop was heavy, and heartily as the labourers worked, it seemed doubtful whether this could be done.

There was a cloud upon Luke's brow, and there was heaviness in his heart; and when he saw his friend and neighbour Mr. Edwards ride into his field, he seemed sorry to meet him, for he guessed correctly that he would

notice and remark upon the absence of Benjamin.

"Well, Luke," said the old farmer, "how are you getting on? Shall you manage to clear all up to-night?"

"I hope so; yes, I think we shall," Luke answered; but he spoke in a troubled voice and with downcast eyes.

"Where is Ben?" continued Mr. Edwards, casting his eyes round the field. "He hasn't gone out to-day, surely!"

"Well, yes; he wanted to go to Ashfield, and—"

"And you let him! He ought to be ashamed of himself, Luke, to leave you at such a busy time. You let him have it too much his own way. He will be the ruin of you, he will indeed, if he goes on like this. You should make him work the same as you do."

"You forget, Mr. Edwards, that to-morrow Ben will come of age. I was thinking of this when you came into the field, and wondering what arrangements will have to be made then."

"No, I have not forgotten it, Luke. And as to the arrangements to be made, you must buy him out of the farm. Give him what

you may, it will be better for you that you should separate."

"But will it be better for *him*, Mr. Edwards?" asked Luke.

"He must look to that. You have done a good part by him. You must not let yourself be ruined for your brother's sake."

This, and a great deal more, said Mr. Edwards before he left Luke, but his advice this time was thrown away. Luke's mind was made up, that, come what might, he would never be the first to suggest his brother's leaving his old home. Sometimes he had wished that Ben would do it voluntarily, and take to some other employment in which his time would be more fully occupied, and which might be more congenial to his tastes; but to get his brother to leave from motives of self-advancement would have been to break the promise made to his father, and *that* he never would do.

It was late in the evening before the last sheaf of corn was taken from the field and the weary labourers retired to rest, but Ben had not returned home. Very patiently Luke waited for him, and many a fervent prayer did he send up to God that he might be guided aright, and enabled to act with love

and discretion towards his brother when he returned ; but he little thought what a trial his affection and fortitude would ere long be put to.

Ben did not return that night at all, but in the early morning he rode up to the house. His flushed countenance, thick and stammering voice, and unsteady gait, as he threw himself heavily from his horse, giving tokens that his time had been spent in excess of riot.

"Where is the boy?" he shouted, as Luke opened the door to meet him. "Why is he not here to take my horse?"

"I'll do that, Ben," replied his brother. "Sam has been in bed some hours."

"He is a lazy dog, then. Why do you keep such idle fellows about our house?"

"It is very late, Ben," Luke answered.

"Late! No such thing," said Benjamin. "Well, take the horse, if you have a mind ; I am tired."

The elder brother put his hand to the bridle, and led the jaded horse to the stable.

"I say, Luke," exclaimed Benjamin, when he returned, "I want to have a word or two with you."

"To-morrow, Ben ; wait till to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" answered Ben, looking at

the clock ; "you mean later to-day. But no, what I have to say I want to say now."

"No, no, I'm tired, and want to get to bed."

"There's no time like the present," replied the unhappy profligate. "Do you know what day this is?"

"Yes, Ben ; I have occasion to remember it. It is the anniversary of our mother's death."

The younger brother seemed for a moment touched. It was but for a moment.

"Yes, and that happened twenty-one years ago, Luke."

"Yes, it did."

"Then I am twenty-one this very day, and that is the point I wanted to arrive at. Now, Luke, I mean to have an alteration here. There must be no more interference from Edwards ; that must be stopped."

"But, Ben—" began the other.

But his brother stopped him.

"No, no ; let me say what I have got to, and then you can have your turn. Now about the men. We must have a fresh staff. Our fellows are idle and good-for-nothing. Look at Shepherd. He's too old to be much good."

"It was our father's wish that we should

keep him on, Ben. You know he has grown old on the farm."

"I say he must go ; and now I am of age I want to know whether I am not to have my share in the management of things. You won't be sole master here in future."

"Why do you talk so, Ben? Do I ever take more upon myself than I ought? You have always been master of your own actions; why should we quarrel now?"

"I don't want to quarrel, but I tell you plainly you *have* taken too much on yourself ; *now* I must have my share in everything."

"Will you take your share in the work, Ben?" said Luke, with more warmth of feeling than he had before exhibited. It was but a momentary spark of resentment, repented of the moment it was elicited. The repentance came too late. Enraged by the implied reproach, the miserable idler and spendthrift raised his hand, and with the strength with which passion had nerved his arm, struck his brother to the ground.

"May God forgive you, Ben!" said Luke, rising ; "it was a cruel blow, but you did not mean it. Let us be friends. There are but two of us in the world, why should we not live like brothers?"

The unhappy young man, calmed, and in some measure sobered by the reaction of his own impetuosity, muttered a regret, and, just before the dawn began to break, the brothers retired to their separate rooms, the one to sleep off the effects of his excess, and the other to implore pardon for his brother and seek wisdom to direct his future course.

CHAPTER IV.

A SEPARATION.

NOT many hours of sleep did Luke Clare enjoy, for while the morning was yet young he was on his way to his friend and counsellor, Mr. Edwards.

For some time those two were closeted together, and when at length Mr. Edwards opened the door to let his visitor out, his brow was clouded, and he seemed vexed and angry.

"You are throwing away your chance in life, Luke," he said, "and without any good reason. I did not think you could be so foolish and obstinate."

"You know my reason, sir," returned Luke, "and I should like it to be as I have said."

"I cannot prevent it," replied Mr. Edwards, "or I should do so. To-day my executorship ends, and you can do as you like with your share of your father's property; we can pretty well see what will become of the rest. In a year your brother will be a beggar."

"Poor Ben!" sighed Luke; "he may get on better if I leave him."

"I have no patience with you, Luke. Why don't you stand up for your rights? You are older than Ben, and you ought to take the lead at the Priory Farm."

"Under the circumstances I can't do it, sir; so it is better as I wish."

"You must do as you will, but I consider you an obstinate and infatuated man, and—" But Luke was out of hearing, and Mr. Edwards did not finish what he was saying. When he turned to go indoors he saw his daughter Bertha, looking pale and frightened.

"What is it, father?" she asked.

"What is it! Why, Luke Clare is going to leave the Priory Farm, and the parish too; he has made up his mind to it, and nothing will turn him."

"But why?" Bertha inquired.

"Why, because he is a headstrong young man. I thought better of him, I did really ; but he is infatuated, and all through that young scamp of a brother of his."

"Poor Luke !" said Bertha.

"There, you are as bad as he is, Bertha ; I can't say a word to Luke about his brother's goings on but what he says, 'Poor Ben !' and when I tell you what I think of Luke all I can get in answer is, 'Poor Luke !' They will both be poor enough before long, I'll be bound."

"I hope not, father ; but, tell me, why is Luke going to leave the old farm ? Has he quarrelled with Ben ?"

"No, no, my dear," said the old farmer, who by this time was getting a little cooler ; "he hasn't quarrelled with Ben ; that's just it. I wish he would ; but rather than do that he means to leave the Priory, and take the Lees."

"The Lees !" exclaimed Bertha. "What, take to that tumble-down old house and poor land ?"

"That is what he has made up his mind to do, Bertha ; but why should that trouble you, you are not going to be his housekeeper, are you ?"

"No," said Bertha, smiling and blushing ;
"but it will be very miserable for him."

"Yes, the place is not very comfortable, certainly ; but he knows his own business best, I suppose ; at least I can't interfere."

In the next parish to that which held the Priory Farm was a small tenancy of some sixty or seventy acres, which by neglect and bad husbandry had fallen into a state of woeful barrenness, except so far as weeds and thistles were concerned. The farmhouse, too, which had never been much more than a cottage, was in a dreadfully dilapidated condition, and certainly had not an inviting appearance. Nevertheless, to the surprise of the whole neighbourhood, except Farmer Edwards's family, it was found that a few weeks after Benjamin's coming of age the elder brother had given up to him the fertile and well-cultivated fields and meadows of their joint inheritance, and had taken for himself a lease of the barren acres just mentioned, and was about to remove to the comfortless dwelling to which they belonged.

Induetimetheremovalwasaccomplished,and Benjamin Clare was sole master at the Priory.

These changes did not pass unnoticed, and when it was further whispered that, to satisfy

the inordinate demands of his brother, and retain, if possible, some hold on him, Luke Clare had sacrificed his own interests, robbed himself of almost every right, and made over to Benjamin by far the greater share of their father's legacy, there were few who did not call him weak and foolish.

"You may think so," said Luke one day to a friend who had tried to put before him his folly, "but I have sufficient reasons for what I have done. As to the Priory Farm, Ben has as much right to it as I, and what would you have said if I had turned him out?"

Time passed on, and though at first it was evident that Luke Clare had a hard struggle to get his land in order, perseverance and industry received their appropriate reward. His little farm, from being the object of derision to onlookers, became that of admiration; and the old house to which he had banished himself speedily put on an appearance of comfort and peace.

"Another year or two of prosperity," said Luke to himself one day, as he surveyed his well-cropped fields—"another year or two, and I think I may venture. Yes, I think I may; but perhaps by that time some one else may have wooed and won her."

He was thinking of Bertha Edwards, and longing for the time to come when he might be in such a position as to be justified in taking to himself a wife. He need not have feared a rival, nor would he had he known how large a share of Bertha's heart he possessed ; but Bertha could keep her own counsel as well as Luke, and when he visited the Hall Farm there was nothing in the quiet and self-possessed manner of the farmer's daughter that could lead him to suppose that it was little wooing she would require from him to make her willing to link her life with his. At the same time, in his secret heart he hoped and believed that were he to ask her hand she would not refuse him.

It need not be supposed that now Luke Clare was on another farm he forgot his brother, or the promise concerning him he had given to his father. Over his brother's farm he exercised a salutary control ; and while its youthful owner, infatuated and enslaved by vicious passions, was squandering time, property, and health in pursuits of shame and folly, the disinterestedness of his brother alone interposed between him and ruin.

But that brother's love had not been tried to its utmost ; a more severe test awaited it.



"I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT YOU."

CHAPTER V.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

IN a dark and grimy office in the town of Ashfield sat Jacob Lewis—"old Lewis the money-lender," he was generally called. He, like the room in which he sat, was dark and grimy, and upon his face, just now, played a sinister smile.

"He can't get out of it," he muttered, as he placed in front of him a pile of papers, through which he had been looking. "He can't get out of it, and he shan't. I will put the screw on, and—"

A knock at the office door interrupted his cogitations, and a moment afterwards Benjamin Clare entered.

"Ha, Mr. Clare!" said the money-lender, with great apparent cordiality; "how strange, I was just thinking about you!"

"Well," answered Benjamin, sulkily, "were you thinking any good of me?"

"I could think no harm of you, Mr. Clare. You are not like some harebrained young fellows who come to me, you are an honest and straightforward gentleman."

"Honest enough for you, I hope, Mr. Lewis ;

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according to all accounts you don't deal much in that commodity."

"Ha! ha! Mr. Clare, you must have your joke," said Lewis, with a cunning smile; "but you must not carry it too far, you know."

"I don't know about joking," returned Benjamin. "You sent word that you wanted to see me; what is it you want?"

"Nothing new, my dear sir, nothing new; those old bills are falling due again, and I want to know when it will be convenient for you to make a settlement, that is all, Mr. Clare."

"You must discount them again, Lewis, as they come in; you know you promised to do that."

"I promised *that*, Mr. Clare!" almost shrieked the money-lender; "why, I should have been beside myself; never, sir, never."

"Yes, you did; when I paid you the last hundred pounds you promised faithfully to do so."

"Where is my promise?" asked Lewis.

"Where is it! what do you mean?"

"Why, where is the written paper of any promise?"

"You know you did not give me any written paper, but you said you would; here in this

very office you gave me your word, you know you did."

"I know nothing of the sort, Mr. Benjamin Clare," answered the other, with apparently rising anger; "I never give a promise except in writing."

In vain did Benjamin try to call to the remembrance of the wily man the conversation that had taken place between them. In vain did he plead poverty, and ask for time to pay the debts he owed. In vain did he rave, and storm, and threaten; the answer was the same, "These bills must be taken up as they fall due."

"I cannot do it," said Benjamin.

"Then you must get your friends to help you."

"Friends! what friends have I? Those who used to swear eternal friendship pass me by now without a recognition."

"There is your brother," suggested Lewis.

"He cannot help me."

"Well, I always heard he was very fond of you, and I thought that perhaps rather than we should push things to the extreme, you know, he might be willing to help you."

"What do you mean," demanded Benjamin, "by pushing things to the extreme?"

"You are too hard, Mr. Clare, to make me say it, but you must know that there is only one course open to me as a man of business. I wish you hadn't forced it from me, but really, you know, unless these things are met, the law must take its course."

"And then?"

"My dear sir, why insist? Well, then—I don't like to say it—but if your effects were not enough to pay all, it means imprisonment till payment is made."

"Then you would sell me up, Lewis," said Benjamin, grasping in a threatening manner the oak stick which he held in his hand. "You would sell me up and imprison me; and you are the man who has egged me on; you have told me time after time that my luck would change some day, and that you would never press me for payment until I could afford it; you—"

"Mr. Clare," returned Lewis, "I am a man of business. I like payment in *coin*, but as you are a friend—yes, I must call you a friend, although you are angry with me now—I don't mind taking a promissory note from any responsible person; perhaps, Mr. Luke, your brother, would do that for you."

Benjamin groaned, but did not answer.

"Why don't you ask him?" Lewis continued; "he is a steady man and a good brother; perhaps he would give a note to help you out of your difficulty; try him."

Ah, Benjamin Clare, it is useless for you to look so angrily and defiantly at the man who holds you in his toils! It is useless for you now to wish you had never known him; to wish that you had led a better life—had been a better son and more worthy brother. Have you never heard read, long ago, when your father used to teach you lessons from the Book of books, or when you used to sit by his side in the old family pew in his place of worship—have you never read, "The way of transgressors is hard"? Have you never heard the precept, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble"?

Yes, you have heard all this ; you have now found out the truth of it. Will you not even now try to turn from your evil ways ? Better imprisonment and disgrace, poverty and wretchedness, than plunge further into sin. But no, you have not filled up your cup of iniquity yet, you have not yet fallen so deep as you will have done before another night has passed away.

While Benjamin was looking indignantly at the wretched man into whose power he had fallen, and striving to think of some means by which he could stave off the impending calamity, Lewis rose from his chair, and opening a cupboard, he produced wine and glasses.

"Come, come, Mr. Clare, you are making the worst of the affair," he said. "Take a glass of wine, and think the matter over."

At first Benjamin declined, but afterwards he accepted a glass of wine, and then another and another ; and as he drank his spirits seemed to rise, affairs assumed a less gloomy hue, and Lewis did not appear so bad a fellow after all. In a short time he was in a state suitable for his more experienced companion to take advantage of.

Drawing his chair close to Benjamin's,

Lewis whispered a few words in his ear—words that made him start and shudder.

“No, no, Lewis ; I have not fallen so low as that,” he said.

“Nonsense, who is to know it ? You can take another turn with the dice. You *must* win some of these days, and long before the time is up you will have paid me all, and the paper can be destroyed.”

“I can’t play any more, I have nothing to stake,” returned Benjamin.

“But I will help you for a consideration ; I will let you have another hundred down if you do as I say.”

“You will ?” exclaimed Benjamin.

“Yes, for a consideration ; and you are bound to win, I tell you.”

Much more passed between the two ; many persuasions were used by the money-lender, and many objections brought forward by Benjamin, who, at the earnest invitation of the other, continued to ply himself with wine. It was the old case of the spider and the fly. Benjamin was entangled in the meshes of the money-lender, and the more he struggled to escape the more he became involved ; the spider, Lewis, had him at his mercy, and, spider-like, he had no pity.

The result of the conference was this. Before Benjamin Clare left Lewis's house the latter held in his hand a promissory note for a large amount, purporting to be signed by Luke Clare.

Unknown to his brother, Benjamin Clare had become a gambler. For a time he was fortunate in his play, and he grew to look upon winning as almost certain; but by-and-by he lost a great deal of money, and in order to pay his "debts of honour" had recourse to Jacob Lewis.

Once in the clutches of the money-lender, there was little hope of escape; the exorbitant interest charged was of itself enough to prevent payment, except by a man of wealth, of the loans procured from Lewis. Nor did he press for payment until his victim had become so completely within his power that he could make him do almost anything he liked. Thus, by flattery and profession of friendship at first, and by threatening and bullying afterwards, had Jacob Lewis obtained so complete a mastery over Benjamin Clare, that he had compelled him to become a party to fraud and wickedness such as, without such a tempter, he would never have dreamed of.

CHAPTER VI.

BENJAMIN'S FLIGHT.

NOT long after the events recorded in the last chapter occurred, Luke Clare received a letter from his brother, who had been absent from the Priory Farm for some days.

The letter was written at Queenstown, and stated that ere it reached the Lees the writer would be many miles on his way to America. In it Benjamin explained the motive for his sudden and secret flight. He had become involved in debt, he wrote, and not knowing where else to go had applied to Jacob Lewis for help. At last, in order to obtain repayment of the money he had advanced, Lewis had threatened him, and in a moment of madness or drunkenness, he knew not which, the writer had forged his brother's name for a considerable sum of money, the amount of which he mentioned. He could not say when or where he did it; he had no recollection of doing it at all; nor would he have believed that he had ever committed so rash an act, if Lewis had not shown him the document and told him that he himself had

given it to him. There was no denying it ; Luke's name was written across the note, and in his (Benjamin's) own handwriting ; and as he had no wish to be tried for forgery, he had made up his mind to fly. The letter went on to say that the writer had taken only enough money with him to answer his present need. Luke had better take possession of the Priory Farm, which he had legally made over to him, and make the best of a bad job. Of course, when the promissory note came due Luke could repudiate it, or, if he chose, could at once show this letter to the authorities ; but whatever he did he (the writer) hoped that Luke would forget that he ever had a brother who was so unworthy of him.

There was little else in the letter, which was written more in a defiant than repentant manner ; but there was enough in it to send Luke to the verge of distraction.

"Why did he not come to me?" he said to himself. "Could he have doubted me? Could he have thought that I would not have helped him, that he must go to a money-lender for assistance? Oh, Ben! Ben! my poor, poor brother! How willingly would I have given up my all to save you from such a crime!"

Long did Luke Clare ponder over the letter ; long did he pray that he might be directed aright ; but at last he made up his mind what to do.

The next morning found him again at Mr. Edwards's asking his help and advice ; but he did not, even to his old friend, disclose his brother's guilt. He only told the old farmer that his brother Ben had gone away to America, that he had made over the Priory Farm to him. "And now," he said, "can you help me to sell the farm, and the remainder of the lease on the Lees ?"

"But why, Luke ?" inquired Mr. Edwards.

"Because I must go after him, sir ; I must not let him be alone. I will find him wherever he is, and, please God, will help him yet."

In vain did the old farmer expostulate and argue. He endeavoured to show Luke the folly of trying to find his brother. "America," he said, "is not like our parish—no, nor like England either. To look for him there would be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. You are mad to think of it, Luke ; yes, verily mad."

"Then I shall remain mad as long as the two of us live," answered Luke. "I promised my father, on his dying bed, that I would

always look after Ben, and I will never leave him."

"But he has left you, Luke."

"And I will find him again, with God's help. What do you say, Miss Bertha?" he continued to that young lady, who had just entered the room. "Am I not right in going to look after my lost brother?"

"Lost!" exclaimed Bertha; "how?"

This was soon explained, and Luke waited anxiously for her answer.

"Go," Bertha answered at length, "and God be with you!"

"Thank you, thank you, Bertha," said Luke. "You have decided for me, even if I had not decided before." As he said this he took the maiden's hand, and looked at her with such evident signs of emotion and tenderness that Bertha burst into a flood of tears.

"Luke," said Mr. Edwards, "I must think this over, and you can talk it over with Bertha meanwhile. I will soon be back."

Ah! Mr. Edwards, you think yourself far-sighted and discerning, but till now you have never guessed your daughter's affection for Luke, nor his for her; and now you think that, by leaving the two by themselves for a time, you have found a means of preventing your friend

Luke carrying out his mad scheme, and for bringing about what you, in your secret heart, have long wished for. But you are mistaken. True it is that ere you return Luke will have told his love, and true it is that Bertha will have accepted that love, but when you come back you will find them both more than ever assured that Luke's scheme is *not* a mad one, but right and proper.

"I suppose I must buy the Priory Farm, Luke," said Mr. Edwards, after all this had been explained; "but I shall hold myself in readiness to give it up to you when you come back. It shall be Bertha's dowry; and as to the Lees, leave it with me, Luke; I will find a purchaser if you mean to go, or I will farm it myself; it is but a little patch on my own land, and you won't be gone long—a year at the most. You must promise me that, Luke, you will come back in a year if you do not find that—that—if you do not find your brother."

"How *can* Luke promise that, father?" said Bertha. "No, Luke, make no promises; you are right in what you are doing, and—and—we can wait, however long it may be."

And so it was arranged, and in another month (vessels did not run so frequently from England to America at that time as they do

now) Luke Clare found himself on board a ship sailing for New York.

The intervening weeks had been fully occupied in looking after Benjamin's affairs; and although Mr. Edwards gave the full value for the Priory Farm and all it contained, and for the remainder of the lease on the Lees farm, Luke found so many debts owing by his brother, that after he had discharged them, which he did to the utmost farthing, he had none too much money left wherewith to make himself possessor of the spurious bill, and yet retain some for his own use during his travels.

As may be imagined, Jacob Lewis was only too pleased to deliver up the promissory note on receiving payment for the amount it represented. Luke did not part with his money, however, until he had assured himself that the signature which had been forged was really in his unfortunate brother's handwriting. Alas! there could be no doubt about it—the brother's writing was very similar to, and might, at first sight, be readily taken for his own.

Having procured the note, he tore it into fragments and burned it; and as the fire consumed the paper and left not even an ash that

was visible, so any feeling of anger or resentment against the brother who had so deeply wronged him was removed from the heart of Luke Clare.

CHAPTER VII.

A VOYAGE AND A WRECK.

THE vessel in which Luke Clare sailed was far different from one of the splendid steamships that ply at the present time between England and America, in which every comfort is afforded to those on board, and the passage is made so rapidly that little time is allowed for tiring of the voyage. It was a barque carrying a miscellaneous cargo to New York.

Luke had some knowledge of the master, Captain Evans, who happened to be a native of the town of Ashfield, and who offered the young farmer a passage at a moderate remuneration, which offer was accepted, and in due time Luke found himself on board the *Water Lily*.

It must not be supposed that it cost Luke Clare no sorrow thus to leave his native land and to expatriate himself for an indefinite

period. It *did* cost him many a pang, but he never swerved from what he considered his duty. He thought that in going to a far country to look after, and perhaps save his brother from sin and suffering, he was fulfilling the promise given to his dead father, a promise that he was determined to keep as long as his brother lived or his own life lasted.

For the first few days of the voyage everything went on prosperously. The sea was calm, and there was just wind enough to keep the *Water Lily* steadily on her course; and had it not been for the grief that Luke had at his heart he would thoroughly have enjoyed his new life.

This state of things, however, was not destined to last. While crossing the Bay of Biscay the *Water Lily* met with bad weather. The wind, which had been chopping about for some hours, at length settled down into a gale that tried the strength of the spars and canvas of the barque. It was during the night that the gale commenced, and at day-break the weather was unabated. Then for the first time in his life Luke Clare could understand thoroughly the words of the psalm he had often read in the quiet and shelter of the Priory Farm :

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters ; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths : their soul is melted because of trouble."

To say that the young landsman was not alarmed would be untrue ; but he kept himself quiet and calm, whilst some of the crew, who had been brought up to the sea ever since their childhood, were at their wits' ends for very fear. The reason for this difference was that Luke put his trust in One who holds the waters in the hollow of His hand, and whom even the winds and waves obey, whilst the others were scoffers and unbelievers.

For two nights and days the vessel was in danger of being overwhelmed by the waves which continually broke over her deck, yet the captain held out hopes that she would weather the storm. But on the approach of the third night the wheel and steering gear were carried away by an enormous sea which threatened to swamp the vessel, and soon afterwards a fearful hurricane carried away the main-yard and threw the vessel on her

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beam-ends, while an enormous wave struck her amidships and made a breach in her hull.

From that moment the vessel was doomed. All possible means to save her were taken : a great part of the cargo was thrown overboard to lighten her, and the pumps were kept going, but with little result, and by the time the morning dawned it was evident that she could not keep long afloat. To add to the horrors of the situation, the boats during the storm had been washed away or rendered useless by the violence of the waves. This being the case, it became necessary to construct a raft on which the unfortunate crew and single passenger hoped to be able to keep afloat until picked up by some passing vessel.

Although Luke, being unused to the sea, suffered severely, he worked at the pumps and the building of the raft with great perseverance. At length the raft was completed. It was but a frail affair, made of planks and spars firmly lashed together ; but even this was better than the ship, which was now in a sinking condition.

After putting on the raft as much of provisions and water as was possible, the vessel

was abandoned, every man securing as much of his personal property as he could carry about with him.

Happily the wind had somewhat abated its violence, and the sea was considerably less rough. Had it been otherwise, in all probability the frail craft would have been sunk as soon as launched.

"We are none too soon, Clare," said Mr. Evans, as the raft was being slowly propelled away from the vessel.

"Will the *Water Lily* go down soon?" inquired Luke.

"Almost directly, I imagine."

"And we," said Luke, "what are we to do?"

"Try and keep afloat till we get picked up by some passing vessel."

While Mr. Evans was speaking the *Water Lily* was seen to lean over to one side, and in another moment, with a sound almost as loud as the report of a cannon, the pent-up air was forced from the hold, the waters rushed in, and with a gurgling sound, almost like a groan from some mighty inhabitant of the deep, the vessel that had so lately seemed capable of defying the elements sank beneath the waves, and nothing was to be seen but a few floating spars.

"There is the last of her," said Mr. Evans. "Now we must look after ourselves."

Unfortunately for those on board the raft, the *Water Lily* had been driven by the tempest out of the track usually taken by vessels sailing between England and North America. The first effort of the crew was therefore to regain this track with as little loss of time as possible—a task not easy to perform with such a clumsy and almost ungovernable craft. However, a sail was rigged up and some sort of a rudder fixed, and before nightfall the raft bore more the appearance of a manageable vessel than it had done when first launched.

It was well for Luke Clare, and the others also, that they had not been brought up luxuriously, for had this been the case, their present position would have been more unbearable than it was. As it was, however, the young farmer could not but wish that he was safe back in the security and comfort of the old Priory Farm, or the Lees, or, better still, in Mr. Edwards's cosy parlour at the Hall Farm.

"Where will it end?" he said to himself. "Shall I ever return to claim Bertha's hand? shall I succeed in my search for poor Ben?"

or am I destined to end my life in the waters of the wild Atlantic? Let it be as it may, I know this, that I am in the hands of Him who is able to do all things, and I pray that, whatever may be my fate, I shall be enabled to say, 'Thy will be done.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON A RAFT—SAVED.

LITTLE did Luke Clare think when he left the sinking *Water Lily* how much suffering of mind and body he would have to pass through before he again set his foot on dry land.

To the young landsman it seemed improbable that the raft would remain for any lengthened period on the water without being noticed by some passing vessel. In his ignorance of such matters he fancied that, unless some accident happened to the raft, they would be picked up in a few hours.

During the first twenty-four hours two vessels passed them, but without seeing the signals the shipwrecked men hoisted. No doubt they were intent upon their own affairs,

possibly each striving to make the voyage in less time than the other ; for, as Mr. Evans explained to Luke, every vessel is required to make its voyage in as short a time as possible, and a great deal of rivalry exists between vessels carrying the same kind of cargo, as that which reaches the port first is almost sure to command the highest price for the goods it brings in.

Day after day passed by, and notwithstanding all the efforts of those on the raft to attract the attention and obtain the help of the many vessels they sighted, they had been unsuccessful. The fifth day had dawned, and the men on board the raft were beginning to suffer greatly from their exposure to the weather, their constant watchfulness, and the short rations upon which they were obliged to subsist ; and, forgetful of the fact that as yet they had been preserved from death, many of them became rebellious, and gave way to murmurings and reproaches. They reproached the God of heaven for, as they termed it, deserting them ; when, if they had only remembered it, in the days gone by, when they deemed themselves in safety, *they* had been only too ready to forsake *Him*. In vain did Luke expostulate. In vain did

he try to point out, not only the folly, but the great sin of such murmurings ; his words appeared to have no effect except to make the men more loud and coarse in their expressions of rebellion against God. Grieved as was Luke Clare, he did not allow himself to be cast down, but occupied his time in secret prayer to Him whom he was well convinced could send help and succour to him and his fellow-sufferers, or in trying by word and deed to keep his companions from repining and despair.

“I can’t make out how it is that you can take things so easily, Clare,” said Mr. Evans on the day in question. “You seem as cheerful as if we were out on a pleasure trip, with every prospect of returning safely home in an hour or two, instead of being in danger of sudden destruction—for we must go down if a heavy gale comes on—or else of a lingering death from starvation.”

“It is useless to make the worst of any circumstances in which we may be placed,” answered Luke ; “and more than that, I feel quite satisfied that, if it is the will of the Almighty that we should not perish, He will find means for our deliverance. We are not in a worse strait now than the Apostle Paul

was when he was shipwrecked, and yet he escaped."

"Ah, I remember something about it," returned Mr. Evans, "but not much. I haven't had much time for Bible-reading lately."

"Let me read the narrative to you now," said Luke, taking a small Bible from his pocket; and, as the other raised no objection, he began to read in a clear voice, so that not only Mr. Evans, but several of the men who stood by, could hear, the account of the apostle's shipwreck as given in the twenty-seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Having finished the narrative, Luke looked round, and seeing how interested his hearers appeared, he ventured to add a few words of encouragement and exhortation.

"We are in the same hands," he said, "as were the apostle and those who were with him, and although no angel has visited us to assure us of our safety, God has power now, as He had of old, to deliver those who trust in Him. He tells us to call upon Him in the day of trouble, and promises that He will hear us. Why should we not take Him at His word, and call upon Him now?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered one of the men; "it can do no harm, let's try it."

In a few minutes Luke was kneeling before God, and pouring out a fervent and earnest prayer that they might be saved from their present peril, if it so pleased their Heavenly Father; if not, that the hearts of each one might be softened and quickened by the influence of the Holy Spirit, so that even though death might overtake the body, the soul of each might find life and safety in that haven which is open to every tempest-tossed soul that is cleansed and purified by the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Probably this was the first time for many a year that some of those who listened to Luke Clare's supplications had heard the voice of prayer, and although it may be they had no great faith in its efficacy, they could but feel the solemnity of thus speaking and pleading with God.

Not long after this, while Luke was trying to gain a little rest by sleep, there was a cry of "A sail, a sail!" On being thus aroused Luke looked eagerly up, and saw a large vessel bearing down in their direction.

Every effort was made by those on board the raft to attract the attention of the vessel, nor were they this time doomed to disappointment. After watching the vessel for

some hours they had the satisfaction of seeing a boat lowered and being pulled towards them.

"We called upon the Lord, and He heard us," said Luke; "let us not forget to give Him the praise."


How many of the men remembered these words when they found themselves in a short time safely on board the vessel it is impossible for us to say, but we may hope that the words spoken by Luke Clare, and the earnest prayer he had offered up, and which so soon was answered, were not lost upon all of them.

The precious truths of the Gospel, when faithfully and prayerfully applied, can hardly fail to take effect. The seed may lie for many a day apparently lost and dead, but who can say that some day it will not spring up and bring forth good fruit?



CHAPTER IX.

LUKE REACHES NEW YORK AND COMMENCES
A JOURNEY.

HE vessel to which the shipwrecked men were transferred proved to be an American trading-ship, returning from England to New York. The captain received

them very kindly, and did everything he could for their immediate comfort. And, indeed, they stood in need of rest and good food ; for since they took to the raft it was little of either they had been able to have, the provisions they had taken from the *Water Lily* having been seriously damaged by the salt water almost immediately they were placed on the raft ; and as to rest, it was next to impossible to sleep with any comfort on a craft so constructed that it was liable to be washed by any wave that happened to strike it.

Very thankful were the men for their deliverance, and there was one at least among them who did not forget to return thanks to Almighty God for having caused them to be rescued from their perilous position. Nor was Luke Clare's cause for gratitude to cease here ; in a short time he was safely landed at the very port he had set out for, and once more was he reminded of the words of the Psalmist :

" He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad because they be quiet ; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven."

Luke's first thoughts on reaching New

York were concerning his brother, and after bidding farewell to Mr. Evans and the others, he immediately commenced his search after Benjamin.

The town of New York in those days was very different from the New York of the present year. True, it was a busy and thriving place, and, considering the comparatively short time of its existence, it had made rapid strides towards becoming what it now is ; but it was then very limited in size, and the number of its inhabitants was not so great as to preclude all probability of finding a newly-arrived emigrant from England. Yet for some time all Luke's inquiries respecting his brother were unsuccessful ; but at length he heard tidings of him, and it happened thus.

One Sunday evening, when Luke was coming away from the place of worship he had regularly attended since his arrival in America, he was accosted by one of the congregation, who invited him to his home to spend an hour or two in friendly conversation.

"I have seen you here on several occasions," he said ; "and as I judge you are a stranger among us, shall be glad to see you

at my house, and to help you if I can in any way do so. But perhaps," he continued, "you are not in need of help, except, indeed, such help and sympathy as we all require."

Luke gladly accepted the invitation, and ere long had communicated to his host the object of his visit to America, carefully avoiding saying anything that could damage the character of his brother.

"'Tis hard to be able to judge in such a case," said Mr. Sherman, when he heard Luke's description of Benjamin; "and yet I think I cannot be wrong in believing that I not only saw, but spoke with the young man you are seeking. If so, he has left this city, and is now, supposing God has prospered his journey, among the wilds which surround Lake Ontario."

"Ontario!" exclaimed Luke; "is not that where there have been so many disturbances with the Indians?"

"Yes, alas! there have been many fierce struggles between the settlers there and the natives, but just lately no news of these risings have reached New York."

"And how can I hope to find my brother?" inquired Luke, sadly; "if, indeed, he has travelled thither."

It was little hope that could be held out to Luke by his newly-found friend, who, on his part, discovered that the young Englishman was not to be persuaded to abandon his project ; so he promised to make inquiries as to when another of those companies of settlers which were frequently leaving New York for distant points would be journeying in the direction supposed to have been taken by Benjamin Clare. Meanwhile he pressed his hospitality upon Luke, saying that he was ever glad to see any one from "home," as he called his native country, England.

Several weeks passed away before Luke was able to start on his journey to Ontario ; but at length he found a party of settlers going thither, and with these he cast in his lot ; and bidding his good friend Sherman farewell, he started once more in search of his brother.

On arriving at a new settlement near the lake he made inquiries as to the whereabouts of the party with whom he supposed Benjamin had associated himself, but only to meet with fresh disappointment. It is true he found the settlers, and was convinced his brother had been among them ; but on arriving at the settlement Benjamin had volunteered to be

one of a company who had determined to push still farther on in search of lands suitable for the formation of a new colony.

"What can I do?" Luke inquired. Alone and unaided it would be impossible for him to follow the route taken by the pioneers, and how to find companions he was at a loss to know. But even now he was not left long in perplexity. An old and experienced traveller who, to use his own words, "knew every inch of the ground for hundreds of miles around," happened to be going after the very party Luke wanted to find.

"You can come with me if you like," he said; "but mind you, if you take up company with me you will have to put up with rough fare and rougher lodgings."

"I shall not mind either," said Luke, "if I can only find the man I am seeking."

"Then let it be a bargain," replied the other. "I shall be glad of company, and you would never find your way by yourself."

It is not necessary to follow Luke and his guide through their long journey—long, at least, when it had to be performed on foot through a country much of which was entirely uncultivated, and where many of the roads were mere tracks through what ap-

peared to Luke Clare to be boundless forests.

It was little luggage the travellers carried with them. A wallet hung at the side of each contained all that was needful for them to take, except the muskets and ammunition, without which no one would have ventured far into the forests. With them the travellers kept themselves provided with food by killing the game with which the [woods abounded; and with them, too, they hoped to be able to defend themselves in case of being molested by any of the original owners of the soil, who now and then revenged themselves on the white settlers for depriving them of their land by killing and mutilating any that they fell in with who were unable to defend themselves.

The time had gone by, however—at any rate in the part where Luke and his companion were travelling—when a constant and destructive war was being waged between the Indians and white men, and when to have attempted to travel any long distance, except in well-armed bands, would have been to have courted almost certain death.

Much has been said and written about the revengeful and bloodthirsty spirit shown by

the Indians, and there can be no doubt that their mode of warfare was treacherous and cruel, and revolting to the ideas of civilised men; but we must remember that in too many cases the settlers, by their arrogant and overbearing behaviour towards the natives of the prairie and forest, brought the vengeance and hatred of the red men upon themselves. Instead of endeavouring by example and precept to win the untutored Indians from their savage ways, and to introduce them to better things, the cry very frequently was, "Exterminate them; destroy them root and branch. *We* want these lands; we want to make *our* homes in *this* place, to found our colonies in *that*, and therefore the red man must perish."

That savagery and heathenism must perish before the march of civilisation and religion is perfectly true, but surely it is not necessary to destroy nations and annihilate tribes in order to prove that we are Christians. Far better would it be to obey the command of the Founder of Christianity, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."



CHAPTER X.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

WHEN Benjamin Clare took his sudden flight from the Priory Farm he seemed to have an idea that by getting away from the scenes of his reckless and sinful debaucheries he would be able to leave behind him the stings of an accusing conscience—that, in fact, he should flee from himself, and, in a different country, among fresh scenes and new occupations, he would become a new man. That he was thoroughly sick of the life he had been leading, and that, after a way, he repented his foolishness in destroying his prospects in life and for bringing disgrace upon his brother's fair name, he was willing to admit ; but if he thought that mere change of scene or country could give ease to his burdened breast, he found himself miserably disappointed. Alas ! his heart was hardened and his eyes were blinded, or he might have known that there is but one way of obtaining peace to the wounded spirit. That way had been pointed out to him many a time when he was a boy, sitting at his pious father's knee. Many a time had he, when his heart was yet tender, made up his mind

to seek it, but he had never done so in sincerity and truth, and now he felt that he had wandered too far from the right path ever to be able to find it.

If he could only have realised that God is near at hand, as well as afar off ; if he could have believed that it is the sinner, and not the righteous, that Christ died to save ; and if he had sought pardon and cleansing in the Saviour's blood, he would have been spared many a bitter hour of almost agonising despair, and might have found that it is possible to become a new creature, to be endowed with a new nature, and to find peace and joy where only sorrow and bitterness have reigned before.

Benjamin had been favoured with a more prosperous passage than was granted to Luke. He reached New York in company with a number of other emigrants from England, in good health and high spirits, notwithstanding the gloomy reflections and distressing thoughts that had haunted him during the voyage. He had, immediately on arriving in America, determined on making his way to some settlement as far from the port of New York as possible, and finding that some of his fellow-passengers were on

their way to a district called by the Indians Pasquotank, on the borders of Lake Ontario, he had joined company with them, and by the time Luke had reached New York he had not only arrived at Pasquotank, but had again left it, as before stated, in order to find new land suitable for the formation of a fresh colony of settlers.

For several days after Benjamin Clare and his fellow-explorers left the settlement of Pasquotank they met with no event worthy of record; but on pitching their camp one night several miles north of Lake Ontario, they were alarmed on discovering the tracks of a large party of Indians, who were evidently in their immediate neighbourhood.

That this discovery should cause consternation among the small band of white men cannot be wondered at, when we remember the character the Indians then bore for cruelty and rapine. Some of the party were eager for an immediate retreat, not liking the idea of camping so near to a numerous body of natives. Others, however, would not hear of this, but insisted on staying where they were.

"We must keep a good look-out," they said, "and if we are attacked we must fight

for our lives. We have good guns and stout hearts, and are quite capable of defending ourselves."

Among those who spoke in this way was Benjamin Clare. Naturally courageous and fond of excitement, he rather rejoiced than otherwise in the prospect of a brush with the Indians. "Let them come," he said; "we will meet them like men, and it will be hard indeed if a crew of savages can harm us."

Little did the young Englishman know how formidable a foe they had to deal with—how subtle and crafty, as well as physically brave, were those he, in his pride, chose to call savages. It was not long, however, before he discovered his mistake in despising them.

As the majority of the party made up their minds to stay where they were, the rest were obliged to agree to the arrangement, and before long all, except those who were appointed as sentinels, were sleeping on the ground as comfortably as if they had been lying on the softest of beds.

Among the number of those who remained on watch, to guard the camp from any surprise of an enemy, was Benjamin.

It was a beautifully calm and pleasant

night. The moonlight shone through the thick foliage, throwing strange fantastic shadows upon the ground around the sleeping travellers.

For some time did Benjamin continue to pace up and down the short distance allotted to him to guard, and, while he thus performed his duties as sentinel, his thoughts returned to his old home, his brother, and his late father. Bitterly he now repented his folly in pursuing the wild course he had, and many a resolve did he make of future amendment. At length, getting tired of his solitary and monotonous walk, he leaned against the trunk of a large tree, and gave himself up to reflection. Old memories came flooding back upon him. Thoughts of his boyhood and youth, of Luke's uniform kindness, and of the grief his conduct must have caused him, filled his mind, and for a time he almost forgot the duty in which he was engaged. From this state of abstraction, however, he was suddenly roused by a hand laid on his shoulder.

At this unexpected interruption to his thoughts Benjamin turned quickly round, at the same time bringing his musket into such a position as to bear upon the person who had so startled him.

It was one of the party with whom he was travelling, an elderly man, and one whom Benjamin had rather avoided on account of his ostentatious way, as Benjamin thought it, of speaking of the claims of religion on men of every degree.

"You were thinking of home," said the man, as soon as Benjamin had recognised him and put down his musket.

"And if I were, what then?" inquired Benjamin. "I suppose I have a right to think of what I like."

"Truly said, friend," answered the other; "but you have no right to neglect your duty. If it had been an Indian foe who had surprised you instead of myself, where would your scalp have been now, I should like to know? and where would the rest of us have been? I think a hundred Indian warriors might have passed unnoticed when I came upon you."

"Had I, then, so far forgotten myself?" asked Benjamin.

"Yes, truly, or how should I have come up to you unobserved? But it is not this I want to speak about now. Let me walk with you on your beat, and I will say what I have to say."

"Speak on, then," said Benjamin, in no very good temper; "but you must be brief, for I shall be relieved shortly."

"You were thinking of home, then," said the other, taking no notice of Benjamin's impatience; "and, if I read your thoughts aright, were wishing that you had not left it."

"Let that be as it may," returned the young man, "I do not see what it concerns you."

"Perhaps you are right; perhaps it is no concern of mine what your thoughts were; but one thing does concern me—shall I tell you what it is?"

"As you will," returned Benjamin; "but, as I said before, you must be brief."

"Then I will come to the point at once. Have you ever heard or read the story of the prodigal son?"

"Which prodigal son do you mean? There have been more than one, I imagine." Benjamin said this with a defiant air, but the abrupt question had startled him.

"Yes, a great many; there is one not far from where we stand. But I mean the young man spoken of by our Lord in the well-known parable."

"Yes, I have heard it more than once."

"And have you ever applied it to yourself? Have you never wished that you too had courage to return to your Father, as the young man in the story did?"

"I don't know what you mean," answered Benjamin, shortly. "I have no father to return to, even if I wished."

"I am grieved to hear it, friend Clare," returned his companion, "though I did not speak of an earthly parent, but of your Heavenly Father. You have left Him, I know. You do not try to conceal *that*; your common conversation allows no doubt about it. You have left Him; will you not return? He is waiting to receive you; He is ready to bless you. Will you not accept His love?"

Very quietly and gently Benjamin's companion spoke—very persuasively and kindly too. But the young man was not pleased; he resented the other's interference, and would gladly have got rid of his company, had he known how.

"I don't know what right you have to talk to me in this way," he said, impatiently. "You do not, cannot know what my life has been, that you should liken me to the prodigal son."

"I do not know what your life has been,

but, as I said before, I know you have left the right path ; you have wandered away from your Heavenly Father, and thus you resemble the young man spoken of in the Scriptures. Do not think me rude, Mr. Clare," continued Benjamin's companion ; " believe me, it is for your own sake that I speak thus plainly. I too have been a prodigal, but I thank God I have been brought back to my Father."

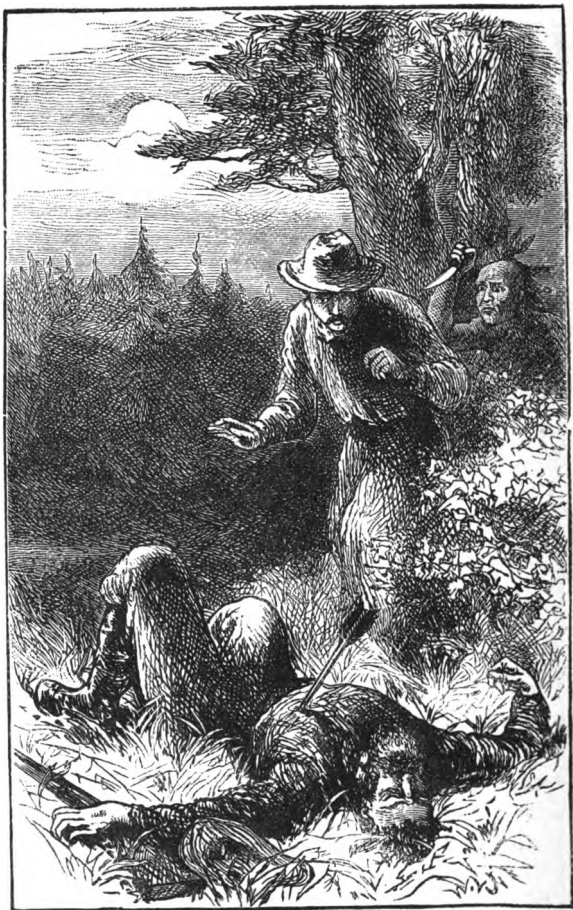
For some time Benjamin listened to the friendly words of counsel addressed to him by his companion, at first in sullen silence, but afterwards with some degree of interest ; and at last, when the two parted, it was with a promise from young Clare that he would hear the history of the other as soon as an opportunity occurred.

The opportunity never did occur. But of this we must speak in another chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

A BRUSH WITH THE NATIVES AND A GREAT CHANGE.

WHEN relieved from his duty as sentinel Benjamin laid himself down upon the ground and tried to compose himself to sleep, but the words that had been spoken



AN UNSEEN FOE.

to him about the prodigal son still rang in his ears and drove slumber from him.

Not long, however, was he allowed to think on this or any other subject, for ere many minutes had elapsed since he gave up the post of guard he was alarmed to hear a groan from the man who had relieved him. Springing to his feet, he instantly ran to the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and, to his horror, found the sentinel lying on the ground, pierced to the heart by an Indian arrow, and, before he could alarm the camp, he himself was rendered senseless by a blow from an unseen foe. At the same time, with piercing and almost unearthly yells and whoops, a number of Indians who had crept unseen upon the camp rushed upon the sleeping company.

In a moment all was confusion, the travellers, although taken entirely by surprise, offering a strong resistance to their stealthy foe, whom they eventually succeeded in driving off, not, however, till more than one of the little band of white men had been sent to his last account. Among these was young Clare's late counsellor. He never lived to tell his story, but it may be presumed that whatever his life might have been, he

left this world to enter into the heavenly rest.

As soon as morning dawned the travellers hastened on their journey, keeping a careful look-out to prevent another surprise, Benjamin Clare and one other who had been seriously injured being carried by their companions on litters roughly made of boughs of trees covered with travelling blankets; and before many hours were over they were left in the care of some settlers who had already formed a little community which lay in their line of march.

For many days Benjamin lay in a state of delirium, the wound he had received proving far more serious than had at first been supposed. When he awoke to consciousness, and was well enough to hear an account of the affray with the Indians, and learned of the death of the man who, only a few hours before, as it seemed to him, had been talking to him so kindly about his eternal interests, he was deeply affected.

"If I had died," he said to himself, "what would have become of me?" This question constantly forced itself upon him, as did also thoughts of his old home, his father's unceasing love, and his own prodigal behaviour,

Sometimes he felt inclined to cry, "I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight," and to strive to seek reconciliation with the God against whom he had transgressed, but his pride of heart, and the fear that he had sinned too deeply to obtain forgiveness, held him back.

The trouble of mind brought on by these feelings greatly added to the sufferings of his body and retarded his recovery ; nevertheless he made progress towards convalescence, and after having been under the care of his entertainers for a few weeks he was sufficiently well to offer his services in some of the minor duties of the farm. At first he was anxious to rejoin the company from which he had been so suddenly separated, but gradually he gave up the idea, and came to an arrangement with the farmer with whom he had been left to stay as a permanent workman and assist in clearing and cultivating the soil. Thus weeks and months passed by, and the young Englishman became familiarised with the rough and solitary life he led. Nor was this manner of living without good effect upon him. It restored to him the health and strength that he had lost by the vicious life he had led in England. He had also

time for reflection, which was not unprofitably employed.

The farmer with whom Benjamin had taken up his abode was a man of piety, as were many of the early settlers in North America. He soon perceived that Benjamin did not seem happy in his mind, that at times he was morose, and always reserved in manner ; and he did and said what he could to make the young Englishman more cheerful. From long experience he had learnt that there is nothing so conducive to happiness as the possession of true religion ; and, knowing this, he made many efforts to bring Benjamin under its influence.

For some time these efforts appeared fruitless, but gradually a new light shone into the young man's mind. The words that had been spoken to him on the night of the Indian affray, followed so closely as they were by a narrow escape from death, had left their impression, and in a degree prepared the soil for other Gospel seed. This seed was supplied, and the result was a bountiful harvest. Before Benjamin Clare had been very long the inmate of the settler's house a change came over him ; he was no longer the reserved and almost churlish man he had been

but became cheerful and apparently happy, although something seemed to weigh upon him that gave him a gravity of manner beyond his years.

This change was effected by the entrance of the truth into his heart ; he had sought and found salvation. He had said, "I will return unto my Father," and that Father had met him and shown him favour.

It is needless to describe the various stages of conviction and of uncertainty through which this returning prodigal passed ere he could confidently feel that he was accepted by his Heavenly Father. All who have gone through the same experiences will be able to sympathise with him, and to understand his feelings. But at length the *hope* that he was accepted of God, that his sins were forgiven, and that he might one day enter into the rest prepared for the people of God, changed to a certainty. He *knew* that his sins were washed away in the blood of Jesus, and, knowing this, he rejoiced in the liberty he had gained. At the same time the remembrance of his past folly and sin cast a sombre hue over his life.

From the time that Benjamin felt the happiness of knowing God he became altered

in more respects than in mere outward conduct; he became a diligent student of the Bible, and a constant suppliant at the throne of grace; indeed, so deeply did he feel his need of Divine help, that not unfrequently, when his work allowed him, he would kneel down in some secluded spot on the farm, and there pour out his gratitude to God for past mercies, and pray for strength to live, in future, to the honour of Him who had redeemed him by His most precious blood.

Happy would it be for all Christians, whether young or old, if they, too, would seize every opportunity of coming to the throne of grace, and of communing with their God. Their spiritual health would be increased, their abhorrence of sin deepened, and their happiness enhanced. But, alas! too many are content with very little of this communion with their Master; and thus they lose much of the blessedness which they might otherwise enjoy, and experience much sorrow and pain, the results of doubts and fears, that they might avoid.



CHAPTER XII.

THE BROTHERS MEET.

WE have mentioned that it was the custom of Benjamin Clare, now that he was a "new creature in Christ Jesus," to come often to the throne of grace, and that many times he gave himself up to prayer, in the woods or fields, when he thought no one was near to observe, and no eye but God's could see.

On one such occasion he was so deeply engaged in his devotional exercises that he did not notice the approach of two travellers, who came rather suddenly upon him ; nor did they observe Benjamin until nearly close to him. On seeing him the younger of the travellers motioned to his companion to remain silent, as, although Benjamin's back was turned towards them, he was afraid of disturbing the kneeling man. The elder of the two smiled rather contemptuously, but, taking the other's hint, quietly seated himself on a fallen tree and remained silent, whilst the younger reverently uncovered, and stood in an attitude of prayer.

In a few minutes Benjamin rose from his knees, and, turning round, saw the others.

For a moment the younger of the travellers remained with his head bowed, then fixed his eyes upon Benjamin, intending to speak to him; but ere he could say a word the latter uttered a loud cry of astonishment, and running towards him, exclaimed, "Luke! Luke!"

"Ben! thank God for this!" cried the other, and in a moment the brothers were locked in each other's arms.

Yes, it was Luke Clare who had so unexpectedly come upon his brother. He and his fellow-traveller had accidentally—or providentially, may we say?—been passing through the very part of the forest where Benjamin was at work, and had found him as described. Had it not been for this meeting, in all probability Luke would have continued on his way in search of the party with whom Benjamin had connected himself.

It is impossible to describe the joy with which Luke heard the story Benjamin had to tell, when in the quiet of the evening the brothers found themselves alone.

"Can you really forgive me, Luke?" asked Benjamin, again and again, after speaking of his past folly, and the great injury he had done his brother.

"As freely, Ben, as I hope to be forgiven. All I want now to make my happiness complete is that you will consent to return with me to the old home."

"Anything but that," returned Benjamin; "I would do anything for you but that."

"But why not—why shouldn't you come back?"

"How can I, Luke? I, an outcast, a criminal, a forger."

"No one knows of that but myself," answered Luke, "and no one ever will know; the document you signed is destroyed—"

"But," interrupted Benjamin, "I think it would be better to stay away from the scene of my folly. I am happy here, Luke, and I am free from the temptations that led me astray. You must be content to leave me here, for a time at least; and if you cannot trust me—and I know I do not deserve your confidence—you can at least leave me to the care of our Heavenly Friend."

"I promised our father that I would always look after your interests, Ben, and I cannot do that if I leave you here."

"You have done more for me now than I have deserved," answered the penitent young man, "but you must not press me to go back

to England, for a time at least. But *you* must go back, Luke, and I wish you every joy."

Luke had already told his brother of his engagement with Bertha Edwards, and of the arrangement Mr. Edwards had made about the farm.

For some time Luke could not be persuaded to leave his brother, but eventually he was led to feel that it was really for Benjamin's own good that he should stay where he was; and knowing that he was safe in the keeping of Him whose watchful care is over all who serve Him, he consented to return to England alone. This he could not do, however, until he met with some party travelling to New York, for although he had come accompanied only by one man, it was not likely he would meet with another with whom he could return. For some weeks Luke remained at the settlement, employing his time in assisting in the farming operations in return for the hospitality shown him by the farmer and his family. During this time he and Benjamin were much together, and many a long conversation they had about their altered circumstances and prospects; but the subject upon which they most often spoke was that of religion.

"Sometimes it seems impossible," said Benjamin, on one occasion, "that I should be accepted of God. I have sinned so deeply against Him, and have made a mock of all that is good."

"We have all sinned," answered his brother; "and if our salvation depended upon our own worthiness, we should all come short of the glory of God; but, thank God, our safety does not depend upon our merits, but upon the merits of Christ our Saviour."

"Yes" said Benjamin, "I know that, and when I think of the mercy of God in bringing me to Himself, I cannot sufficiently express my thankfulness."

"No, it is impossible to do that; but we may all strive to show our gratitude by giving up ourselves to the service of Him who has redeemed us and washed us in His most precious blood."

"And that I will do," answered Benjamin; "I have wasted too much of my life in folly and sin, but now that I have found salvation, I will devote the remainder of my life to the service of Him who has washed me in His precious blood."

Such was Benjamin Clare's resolve, and nobly did he carry it out. During the time

he remained in the settlement, and, indeed, until the day of his death, he used all his influence to bring others into the same refuge which he himself had found ; and many a heart did he cheer with words of counsel and encouragement, such as could have come only from one whose heart had been touched by Divine grace.

It must not be supposed that from the day of his conversion he was a perfect man ; but when he discovered his weakness he strove earnestly to overcome it, and struggled against the temptations that beset him. Nor was his the religion which is contented with abstaining from sins only ; the whole tenour of his life proved that he endeavoured to cultivate those graces which do more to distinguish the true Christian from the mere professor than the non-commission of acts of vice.

CHAPTER XIII.

LUKE RETURNS TO NEW YORK—A PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

THE time at length came when Luke had an opportunity of returning to New York in company with a party of traders who were journeying thither.

The parting between the brothers produced in each feelings of a mingled nature. If there was sorrow at separating so soon after their strange and unexpected meeting, there were also joy and thanksgiving that the meeting had been of such a happy character, and had led to such an interchange of thoughts and feelings that until then they had never known.

For the first time since they were mere children, Luke and Benjamin Clare had felt the blessedness of mutual love and sympathy. But now they must part, as it seemed probable, never to meet again in this life, for Benjamin mournfully rejected every idea of ever returning to his native land.

"No, dear Luke," he said, when his brother tried to persuade him once again to return with him. "I shall stay here, most likely, as long as I live. It is here that I have found what life is worth living for, and here will I strive to bring others to the same knowledge. When I came away from you, Luke," he continued, "I wished you to forget me. I hoped that you would be so angry that you would think no more about me. I little knew how good and noble you were. But *now—*"

"Now you do not wish to be forgotten, Benjamin," interrupted Luke, "nor will you be."

"I know it, Luke, I know it; and when you can send me news, you will, though how it is to reach me here I cannot tell."

"I will send as frequently as possible, and if I send to the good man in New York, Mr. Sherman, I doubt not he will find means of forwarding my letters to you. I will try to arrange this with him."

"And in your prayers, Luke—you will not forget me in your prayers?"

"You may rest assured of that, dear Ben; and I shall have yours in return, I know."

With conversation such as this the brothers passed the evening previous to Luke's departure.

Before the sun had set again the elder brother was some miles distant from the settlement, and Benjamin had begun to realise how much he loved him, and how greatly he should miss him. But he did not regret having stayed behind. He dreaded a return to the old scenes, and felt that in remaining where he was he was acting for the best.

As we have already shown, a long march

through the dense forests and across the plains of North America was, at the time of which we are writing, an undertaking attended with considerable danger. Now that the vast continent of America is intersected with lines of railway, and the modern traveller may reach any place of importance with ease and comfort, it is difficult to imagine the privations and dangers to which travellers were exposed when the country was yet "young." Added to the fact that they were liable to the hostilities of the native Indian, from whom, if once within his power, they could look for no mercy, they were in constant danger of becoming lost in the forests, and having to wander for days before they could discover the path they had left.

In the immediate neighbourhood of large towns the land was cultivated and roads laid down, and the country assumed a civilised and prosperous appearance ; but beyond this, except where some enterprising settlers had formed a colony, little had been done to render travelling either safe or agreeable.

As Benjamin Clare had been exposed to one of the dangers above mentioned, so his brother had to encounter the other. Although the party was accompanied by a guide who,

from his experience and sagacity, would hardly have been thought likely to miss the way, yet this he actually did.

Towards the close of the second day's march doubts arose in the minds of some of the travellers whether they were journeying in the right direction, and on the morning of the third day these doubts resolved themselves into certainties. To find that you are wrong is the first step towards setting yourself right. No sooner was the discovery made that they were actually moving in a wrong direction than the travellers endeavoured to set themselves right by retracing their steps towards the path from which they had diverged; but in this endeavour they signally failed. The forest through which they were marching, although of considerable extent, was not so closely packed as many others. Had it been, the probability of losing the way would have been far less, as, in the latter case, there would have been a distinct track or road, from which it would have been almost impossible to have accidentally turned; but in the comparatively open ground it was easy to wander in a wrong direction.

Any one who has much experience of our

larger English woods will know how readily a stranger may become bewildered, if once he leaves the trodden path and allows himself to lose sight of it. A clump of undergrowth here, or a fallen tree or patch of swampy ground there, has to be avoided, and a *détour* is made to effect this end, and the stranger pushes on, confident that he is going in the right direction, but very probably to find himself, by-and-by, at the very spot from which he started. In a case of this kind the traveller requires all his self-possession, for if he once loses his head, the probability is that he may walk for hours before he finds his way out of the wood, and then he will possibly be at the opposite side from that which he wished to gain.

If this is the case in our woods, which are none of them very large, it will readily be seen how great a difficulty may be experienced by a lost traveller in an enormous forest such as our party were travelling through. After searching in vain for any signs by which they might discover their whereabouts, a consultation took place as to their best way of procedure.

They knew that New York lay to the south or south-east, and guided by the sun,

they could easily determine their course ; but it was not only to find their way that they wanted, but to avoid such districts as were well known to be the camping grounds of hostile Indians. It was a critical position to be placed in, but the men who composed the party were not such as were easily daunted or disheartened ; they were used to hardships and dangers, and made but light of either. Nevertheless, they were angry at being delayed on their journey, and severely blamed the man who acted as their guide.

It was a great disappointment to Luke Clare as well as to the others. Now that he had once set his face towards home, he was anxious to reach it as soon as possible, and the delay was irksome in the extreme, but he tried to bear the disappointment with fortitude, and abstained from blaming the guide.

For the next day or two the party continued their way through the forests and plains in the direction of New York, every precaution being taken not to stumble unexpectedly upon an Indian encampment, or to discover themselves to their foes.

In this they were successful, and eventually they found their way to New York ;

but the protracted journey and the strange and somewhat stinted fare that they had been obliged to put up with, had considerably told upon Luke's health, and when once more he found himself the guest of Mr. Sherman, it was also to find himself broken down and in need of rest and care before he could return to England.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. SHERMAN'S NARRATIVE.

“**Y**OU must be contented to make yourself my guest a little longer, my young friend. I will not keep you a day longer than is necessary, but there is no vessel returning yet.” It was Mr. Sherman who spoke, and Luke Clare was the “young friend” he addressed.

For some days Luke had stayed with his hospitable entertainer, every day hoping to hear of a vessel by which he might return to England, but as yet none had left the port for that country.

“You are very good, sir,” answered Luke, “in showing me so much kindness, and I hope that if ever you return to England, as you

half mean to, I think, you will allow me an opportunity of returning your hospitality."

"That I will," answered the old gentleman. "But," he continued, after a pause, "I don't know that I ever shall return. I have no friends there now; they are all gone, and ere long I must follow them. But still," he resumed, more cheerfully, "I should like to see the old home again, and perhaps I may make up my mind some day, ere very long, if I am spared, to visit my native land." It was seldom that Mr. Sherman allowed even his most intimate friend to see how fondly he dwelt upon the memories of his old English home, but he had taken a liking to Luke Clare, and opened his mind to him as he did to no one else. For a few moments there was silence, and when Mr. Sherman spoke again it was with evident emotion.

"Would you like to hear a little of my history, Mr. Clare? It is not much I have to tell, but I feel as though the telling it to you would give me relief."

Perhaps Luke looked a little surprised; at any rate Mr. Sherman thought so, for he continued, almost apologetically, "There is something in you, Luke—let me call you Luke—that puts me in mind of home and

makes me feel inclined to speak of bygone days."

"I shall be happy, sir," answered Luke, "to hear anything you like to tell me."

"Then I will tell you something of my past life ; if I weary you, you must tell me.

"I was born in the county of Kent, the most lovely of all the beautiful counties of old England. My father was a well-to-do farmer, and my prospects in life, when I was a boy, were bright ; but, alas ! like many other such prospects, they faded away ere I had reached full manhood. My father died, and after his death misfortunes of one sort and another followed each other in quick succession ; the farm did not prosper as it had done ; we had bad harvests, the cattle took the disease, and many of them died, and in two or three short years after my father's death, what had been one of the most flourishing farms in the neighbourhood became impoverished and barren. Still we might have managed to keep our heads above water, had it not been for the dishonesty of the man who was engaged by my mother to look after the farm. He robbed her in every possible way, and at last brought us to entire ruin, and we had to leave the farm. This was

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a blow that proved too great for my mother ; she was taken ill, and not long afterwards she died, I always thought, broken-hearted.

"I had but one sister, a lovely girl, some three years younger than myself. At first we were so grief-stricken that we hardly thought of the future ; but the stern realities of life soon aroused us from this state, and I began to look about for employment.

"Just at this juncture a distant relative came to our relief ; he offered to take my sister, my dear little sister Florence, to his own home, and to introduce me to a business firm in this city.

"I need hardly say that his generous offers were thankfully accepted, and though it almost broke my heart to leave my only sister, who was everything to me, I came here with all possible speed.

"Once, and once only, since then have I been to England. On my arrival there I found that my relative, the man who had so befriended me, was just dead, and my sister gone, no one knew where ; some, of whom I inquired, said she was married ; but I never could find out to whom, nor discover any clue to her whereabouts.

"I returned to America dispirited and

broken in health and in temper, and had it not been for the grace of God, I might have plunged into excess and wickedness; for at that time I knew nothing of religion. But God willed it otherwise—I was brought to a knowledge of the truth, and was kept from evil.

“On returning, I went back to my old employers, and served them for many years, when, on the death of one of the partners, I was surprised to find myself his sole legatee, on one condition, and that was that I should take his name; my real name is— But I do not know that I need trouble you with that—it is not Sherman, at any rate. Since then I have been making money fast, and now I am well-to-do; but what is the use of money to me, without a relative to care for, or one to care for me?

“Yes, if ever I do come to England again, and I sometimes wish to do so, I shall certainly come and see you, Luke, if it is only for the remembrances that you call up to my mind.”

“And do you not think your sister may be yet alive, sir?” asked Luke.

“I cannot think so?” returned Mr. Sherman; “I must have heard from her if she still lived

—no, she is not living, and I am left alone.”

“Not alone, sir,” suggested Luke, “since you have a friend in Him who sticketh closer than a brother, and who has said, ‘I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.’”

“You are right, Luke,” returned Mr. Sherman, “you are quite right. But as far as earthly relatives are concerned I am alone. I would that I had some to love and care for me in my old age.”

“I have only one relative that I know of,” returned Luke, “and I am leaving him here, and probably shall never see him again.”

“But you are young, Luke ; you will form new relationships, and live to be a happy father, perhaps, and then you will not notice the absence of other kinsmen. With me it is different ; I am old, and have not many years to live. Mine has been a solitary life, and so it must end.”

It was not much that Luke could say to cheer his friend ; but what he could say he did.

Mr. Sherman very readily undertook to find means of forwarding to Benjamin any letters that might arrive for him from England ; he also promised to write sometimes to Luke, in

whom he appeared to take an unaccountable interest, and whom he treated with the most lavish hospitality whilst he remained in New York. This, however, was not for a very lengthened period. In a week or two a vessel sailed for England, and Luke once more prepared to cross the ocean.

The voyage home was a quick and prosperous one, and in a few weeks after his departure from America, Luke Clare found himself upon the shores of his native land.

Need it be said that he was soon on his way to the Hall Farm, impatient of the slightest delay that kept him away from her, the thought of whom had so often filled his mind while far away? We think not.

CHAPTER XV.

HOME AGAIN—A CONFESSION.

IT is not necessary, even if it were possible, to describe the reception that awaited Luke on his arrival at the Hall Farm. Mr. Edwards met him with hearty kindness, and Bertha with warm affection, whilst the whole village turned out to welcome his return.

"And so you really found your brother?" said Mr. Edwards, when, on the evening of Luke's arrival, the family party was sitting round the comfortable fireside. "Well, it's more than I expected."

"And almost more than I dared hope, sir," answered Luke. "I must confess that when I arrived at New York, and could hear no tidings of Ben, my heart almost failed me."

"And you say he is changed, Luke?"

"Yes; changed indeed! I wish you could see him now, Mr. Edwards, and hear him speak of the change he has experienced—you would be no less astonished than I was."

It was a long story that Luke had to tell that night. The history of his shipwreck, and his experiences on the raft; the kindness he had received from Mr. Sherman; his travels through the forests, and his meeting with Ben, had all to be related in turn.

Mr. Edwards, too, had plenty to tell concerning the work that had been going on during Luke's absence. The crops on the Lees Farm had been unusually good, and under the old farmer's superintendence the Priory Farm had done well too, so that Luke had much to be thankful for.

One thing disturbed his happiness, how-

ever. It was the receipt of a message from Lewis, the money-lender, to the effect that he wanted to see Luke at Ashfield. What could Lewis want with him? Luke asked himself. Surely there was nothing else to be divulged—no further bills to be taken up! But no; he felt sure that Ben would have told him if he were in any way further involved.

"I did not know that Lewis was a friend of yours, Luke," Mr. Edwards remarked:

"Nor is he," answered Luke; "I have never spoken to him except on one occasion, and then on a matter of business."

"Well, I suppose you will go and see him?"

"Yes," said Luke, "I suppose I had better; but what he can want with me I cannot imagine."

Accordingly, the next day Luke drove over to Ashfield, and once more found himself at the money-lender's office.

In answer to his inquiry whether Mr. Lewis was there, the clerk in attendance shook his head. "He will not come here any more," he said, "he is very ill—not expected to live. You must go to his house if you wish to see him."

Having procured his address, Luke went at once to the house. At first he was refused

admittance, but on giving his name, and saying that Mr. Lewis wished to see him, he was allowed to enter.

"Please take a seat, sir," said the servant ; "master is very ill, but perhaps he will see you."

Luke could not help wondering what the sick man could want him for ; but he had not long to wait before the servant returned and showed him the way to Lewis's chamber.

The room was so darkened that at first Luke could not see the features of the man who sat, or rather reclined, in an easy-chair by the fireside. When, however, he became more accustomed to the light, he recognised the sharp, unpleasant face of Jacob Lewis.

"I am sorry to find you are ill, Mr. Lewis," said Luke, whose good-nature overcame the repugnance he felt for the man he addressed.

"Sit down, Mr. Clare," gasped the sick man. "I am glad you are come. Do you guess why I want to see you ?" he continued in a hard, rasping voice.

Luke at once professed his inability to conjecture why he had been sent for.

"Can you keep a secret ?" asked the invalid, after a few moments' silence.

"If need be, I can," answered Luke ; "but

what secrets there can possibly be between us I am at a loss to think."

"Very likely ; but I have something to say to you that you must promise not to speak of till after—after my death," faltered Lewis.

"Don't speak so, Mr. Lewis," said Luke ; "you surely are not so ill that you need speak of death?"

"I cannot last long, the doctors tell me ; my disease is a fatal one—but this is nothing to the point. I have something to say that affects us both, and your brother too. But I must have your promise that what I say shall not be used against me."

"Affects my brother, do you say ? How can anything you say affect him ?" exclaimed Luke, who had so poor an opinion of the man before him that he felt no inclination to trust him. "No, Mr. Lewis," he continued ; "I can make no promises. If you have anything to tell me, you must do it unconditionally."

"Then," returned the other, "the secret must die with me, and your brother must remain under an unjust accusation."

Luke started at these words. "What do you mean ?" he exclaimed. "What do you know about Ben ?"

"Give me the promise I ask for, and you

shall know. Without it you will hear nothing."

For a moment Luke hesitated, and then he consented to give the required promise.

"I cannot live many days," said the invalid, "and I would fain make restitution for one act that has been a burden to me ever since I committed it. Can you think what it is, Mr. Clare?"

Luke shook his head.

"Come nearer to me," continued the dying man. "That bill," he said, "the bill that bore your signature; you remember?"

"Yes," answered Luke, starting. "What of it—what of it, Mr. Lewis?"

"You thought your brother had forged your signature—"

"Yes, yes," Luke exclaimed, eagerly.

Here the poor invalid became so ill that Luke was obliged to call the nurse. Once more left by themselves, he went on,

"You thought he forged your name, Mr. Clare, but he did not; the signature was a good imitation of yours, better than your brother could have made. The writing was mine."

"Yours?" cried Luke. "And my poor brother—"

"Was wrongfully judged," said Lewis. "The forgery was mine, not his. I drugged him, and then copied your signature from a letter he had in his pocket."

Much as Luke pitied the miserable man who spoke, he could hardly refrain from speaking angrily.

"Is this known to any one but ourselves?" he asked as quietly as he could.

"No; I was afraid you would find me out, but you were too eager to screen your brother. Since that day I have had no peace. Believe me, Mr. Clare, I never before committed such an act, and now I would make what restitution I can."

"You cannot bring my brother home again," said Luke.

The sick man groaned; he was finding out that the way of transgressors is hard.

"I can return the money," he said; "and it was for that that I wanted to see you." As he spoke he took up a pocket-book and counted out in notes the amount that Luke had paid him. "This much will be off my conscience, at any rate," he continued.

"But that is not enough," said Luke. "You have sinned against God as well as man. Have you found peace with Him?"

We cannot tell all the words of counsel and sympathy that Luke Clare spoke to the dying man. Every feeling of anger was quelled when he witnessed the contrition of the man who had so wronged his brother. It was late in the day before he left Lewis's house, and then he left it with a full heart. The money-lender was dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEWS FROM BENJAMIN.

TIMES and seasons pass away so rapidly that the least thinking among us must sometimes have felt the truth of the words spoken so many years ago by the Psalmist, "We spend our years as a tale that is told."

Years have passed away since Luke Clare sat at the bedside of the dying money-lender. They have been years of prosperity with him. He has striven to acknowledge God in all his ways, and, according to His promise, the Lord has directed his steps.

He looks older now than when we saw him last, and the children who are crowding around his knee as he reads messages of love

from a letter he holds in his hands—a letter from Uncle Ben—prove that time has not been at a standstill with him.

“And so we may really expect to see Uncle Ben in a few days?” asks the mother of the little ones, whom we may recognise as the Bertha Edwards of old; Bertha Clare now, by-the-bye.

“Yes, and my old friend Mr. Sherman with him,” answered her husband. “He must be quite an old man now,” he continued; “I thought him so when I saw him twelve years ago.”

“Yes, just as I used to think my father old years and years ago, but he is strong and well yet,” said Mrs. Clare.

“And hope to be so for many a day,” cried Mr. Edwards, entering the room unexpectedly. “If it were not for all these little ones,” he continued, “I should feel myself as young as ever.”

The entrance of their grandfather, who was a constant visitor at the Priory Farm, now held by Luke Clare, was a signal for the children to commence a romp, in which the old farmer heartily joined.

“And Ben is really coming back, is he?” asked Mr. Edwards.

"Yes ; he says that he has prospered beyond his most sanguine hopes, and that he feels a great longing to see his old home and his only relatives ; and as Mr. Sherman let him know of his intention to return to England, he determined to come with him."

"I am glad of it, heartily glad," said Mr. Edwards. "It is a pity he should have ever gone away ; and yet," he continued, "I ought not to say that, for it has turned out right after all."

"Yes," answered Luke, "it did seem a great pity at the time ; but, as you say, it has proved a good thing. From the accounts I have had from Mr. Sherman, Ben seems to have been very useful in America."

"Have you heard from that gentleman again?" inquired Mr. Edwards.

"I had a letter from him with Ben's," Luke answered. "And from what he says, I judge that had it not been for Ben, the whole settlement where he is would have been destroyed by the Indians, and scores of lives sacrificed."

Luke was quite right in this judgment ; but to be able to explain the matter, it will be necessary to give some history of Benjamin's life during the time that had elapsed between

Luke's departure from America and that of which we are writing.

As we have already said, Benjamin Clare had not lived an idle life, but had devoted all his energies and time, when not actually at work on the farm, to the spreading of the Gospel among his neighbours, and other works of usefulness.

Among other things in which he took a delight was that of teaching the poor benighted Indians with whom he came in contact the way of salvation as revealed in the word of God.

It grieved the young Englishman to see the state of darkness and degradation that surrounded them, and to feel that the more they came into the society of the settlers, the greater that degradation was. True, there were others besides Benjamin who felt pity and love for them, and tried to enlighten and elevate them. But, alas! there were many more who looked upon and treated them as wild beasts; who thought it no wrong to cheat and deceive them in any transactions they might have with them; and who, in order to be able to do so, encouraged them in their taste for spirit drinking—a taste which, once indulged in by a native, was nearly sure to prove fatal to him. It has been said that the

“fire-water” of the white men did more to destroy the original owners of North America than all the battles in which they so bravely fought, for what they considered their right, the uninterrupted possession of their native land.

It was Benjamin’s custom, whenever any number of Indians encamped in the neighbourhood, to visit them, and endeavour to do them good.

On one such visit he found a native chief ill, and apparently dying ; all had been done for him that his friends could do, but now they looked upon him as one nigh unto death. The young settler also thought that he was nearing his end, and this made him very earnest in trying to point him to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.

It was little that he could say to the poor invalid ; but he prayed for him, that his health might be restored, and that he might be enabled to find pardon and safety in Jesus Christ.

The chief did recover health sufficiently to bear removal, and when Benjamin came again to visit him, he had been carried by his friends far away.

Little did Benjamin think under what circumstances he would next meet the Indian.

He *hoped* that the few words he had spoken to him of the Saviour might be remembered by him, but he did not expect ever to see the harvest which sprang from the seed he had sown.

Time passed away, and changes took place in the rapidly growing settlements. Among other notable changes was the different relationships that existed between some of the Indian tribes and their white neighbours.

For some time the villages in the neighbourhood of that in which Benjamin Clare lived had been free from any Indian incursions, the natives and settlers being on friendly terms; but unfortunately quarrels arose between them. The right to certain lands claimed by the latter was denied by the Indians, and an open rupture appeared imminent.

In vain did the most peaceably inclined of the settlers try to adjust the disputes, and endeavour to soften the feelings of the contending parties. A feeling of hostility showed itself in a most unmistakable manner, and at length the colonists had to prepare themselves for a conflict with the Indians.

It was at this juncture that Benjamin Clare came to the fore. He was unwilling that

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there should be warfare with the Indians, and proposed that delegates should be sent from the settlement to the hostile camp, to endeavour to arrange amicably the disputes that existed between them.

This proposition was met with some degree of favour; but the question came, "Who was to venture among the savage foe?" None seemed inclined to do this until Benjamin declared his willingness to take that duty upon himself.

It was a dangerous thing to do, but the young Englishman trusted in Him who is able to protect His people even under the most desperate circumstances, and he started forthwith for the camp of the Indians, who were now in the near vicinity of the settlement, determined upon war with the white men.

On nearing the camp, Benjamin saw that there was something unusual going on. Indeed, so busy were the Indians that he had an opportunity of watching their proceedings from a short distance before he discovered himself to them.

The warriors of the tribe were assembled, painted and armed for battle, each bearing his tomahawk and scalping-knife. As the

young settler approached unseen, he saw that the Indians were preparing for a war-dance—the last ceremony, as he well knew, that they would perform before a battle. Uncertain whether to advance boldly among them, or to wait until circumstances should reveal him to them, he stood for some time watching their ghastly revel.

Around a pole planted firmly in the ground the warriors were assembled. Musicians were seated on the ground, while the women and children of the camp looked on, and occasionally encouraged the men to warlike deeds.

Suddenly the beating of Indian drums commenced, and with it the war-dance of the red men. At first, with a slow step, they marched round the before-mentioned pole, but their steps soon became more rapid, and in a short time the whole of the warriors were dancing wildly, brandishing their weapons and yelling their war-cry. It needed but a few minutes of this dance to excite them to a seeming frenzy; and, in the dusk of the evening, it needed but little imagination to transform the painted savages into demons, so frantically did they throw themselves about, and so hideous were the cries they uttered.

While Benjamin was watching their pro-

ceedings, one of their number caught sight of him, and, rushing upon him with an almost fiendish yell, pinioned his arms and threw him to the ground. In a moment all was confusion in the camp. The excited warriors collected round the young Englishman, and his destruction appeared inevitable, when, at the command of the chief of the tribe, he was brought into the centre of the camp.

"What does the pale face in the red man's camp?" inquired the chief.

Benjamin explained, or partially explained, his errand; but the statement that he had come by himself, and with no sinister motive, was met with incredulity. He, however, pointed out that he was unarmed, and had come voluntarily to the camp, and in the end prevailed upon the chief to hear fully the message of conciliation he had brought from the settlement.

Whilst he was speaking the Indian gazed upon him keenly and curiously, but at length he seemed satisfied with his investigation, and expressed his satisfaction by uttering an exclamation that, if not musical, was, at any rate, not unfriendly in its tone.

When Benjamin ceased speaking, the Indian remarked, with calm dignity, "The

white stranger does not remember his red brother?"

The young Englishman had to confess that he did not recognise in the man before him any one whom he had seen before. Eventually, however, the Indian explained how and where they had met, and reminded Benjamin of the words he had spoken to him of the Great Spirit and of the land of spirits far away where they must all some day go. He also said that he meant to learn more about these things when he had time, but now his thoughts were too much occupied with other matters.

As may be imagined, Benjamin was not slow in taking advantage of this introduction. He remembered quite well the almost dying Indian chief whom he had years ago visited, and he pleaded that on the score of their old acquaintance a patient hearing should be given to him.

With all the eloquence he possessed Benjamin pressed his case, and the result of the interview—which lasted several hours, for many of the warriors were called into counsel—was an agreement that the settlers and Indians should meet in friendly conference, and ascertain whether arrangements could be

made which would do away with the necessity for war and bloodshed.

This conference did shortly afterwards take place, with the most happy results, and thus, through the courage and sagacity of Benjamin Clare, what must have proved a calamitous war to the settlers was avoided.

The Indian chief did afterwards hear more from Benjamin of the white man's God ; and it was ever afterwards a happy satisfaction to the young man to believe that he had been instrumental in bringing this savage warrior to the feet of Jesus, and he rejoiced to think that he should meet him again among that multitude whom no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, that shall stand before the throne and before the Lamb, to praise Him who has redeemed them and washed them in His precious blood.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN OF BENJAMIN—A DISCOVERY.

HOME! There is something in the very sound of the word that cannot fail to produce pleasing thoughts in the breasts of most of us. How cold, how cal-

lous, or else how utterly miserable must be the heart that does not bound with pleasure at the prospect of returning home after years of absence !

No such heart was Benjamin's Clare's. It was with a sense of exquisite pleasure and thankfulness that he found himself approaching the shores of his native land. Nor was his companion, Mr. Sherman, less affected as the two stood upon the deck of the vessel that had brought them from America, and gazed upon the outline of the English coast, then only just visible.

"I little expected ever to see the old home again, Clare, when I first became acquainted with you," he remarked to Benjamin. "I thought to have ended my days in the land where most of them have been spent."

"And I," answered Benjamin, "when I left England, did so with the full intention of never returning. God has been very good to me," he continued, "or I should not now be where I am."

"And who of us must not say the same?" returned Mr. Sherman. "If we none of us had more blessings than we deserve we should be but poorly off."

Mr. Sherman and Benjamin Clare had long

been acquainted, the latter having been several times to New York during his residence in America, and never without tasting the hospitality of the former. The old gentleman had taken as great a liking to Benjamin as he had formerly to his brother, and it was partly owing to his influence that Benjamin was now returning to England. He knew something of the young man's history now, for when Benjamin heard from his brother of Lewis's confession a great load had been taken off his mind, and the chief cause for silence as to his former life was removed. And his gratitude to his brother for his past forbearance and love had led him to let his friend into some of the secrets of his youth. These revelations produced a feeling of admiration for Luke in the breast of Mr. Sherman that made him appear almost as anxious as Benjamin to meet once more the man who had acted so nobly.

In a few more hours the two friends landed in England, and Benjamin started at once to his native village, leaving Mr. Sherman in London to follow in a few days.

The actual arrival at the old home, and the meetings that then took place, we shall not attempt to describe; it is sufficient to say

that there was not a happier or more thankful family party in any of the happy homes of England than that which was assembled at the Priory Farm on the night of Benjamin's return.

How familiar appeared every scene to the returned wanderer! The years that had passed away since his departure had scarcely altered the aspect of the quiet village. The woods, the fields, the hills and dales were unchanged; but there was a change in Benjamin Clare, greater than that which had been produced by time and travel. He felt this, and praised God for it.

He had left his old home a fugitive, a reckless, sinful man, with a heart full of hate for all that was good; he returned to it a happy, cheerful Christian, abounding in love to God and man. What but the power of God's Holy Spirit could have produced a change like this? Nothing! And well Benjamin knew this, and while he was grateful to his brother for the great love he had shown to him, he acknowledged that it was God alone who had changed his heart; and often would he exclaim, if not in the actual words, yet in the spirit of the hymn:

“’Tis Thine the passions to recall,
And upwards bid them rise,
To make the scales of error fall
From reason's darkened eyes.
To chase the shades of death away,
And bid the sinner live ;
A beam of heaven, a vital ray,
’Tis Thine alone to give.”

In a few days Mr. Sherman arrived, and was gladly welcomed by all, his kindly and genial manner winning the hearts of young and old alike. With Mr. Edwards he soon became on very friendly terms, and from him he learned more of the brothers than he had yet known, for the old farmer was never tired of speaking the praises of his son-in-law Luke. About Benjamin he said less, for, as he said, when such a change had been effected in a man as had passed over Benjamin Clare, it would be worse than useless to speak of past failings.

“And after all,” he said, after offering this remark, “he was much to be pitied when a boy. He lost his mother before he knew her, and his father was so passionately fond of him that he grew up a spoiled child.”

“You knew their father well, I think?” said Mr. Sherman.

“Yes, I knew him well, long before he was

married ; and his wife too, for that matter. She was as good a girl as ever lived, and would have made a good mother if she had been spared ; but she was taken away in the prime of life, when Luke was quite a little child. It was a sad blow to Mr. Clare," continued the old farmer, "his heart was wrapped up in his 'little Florence,' as he used to call her."

At the mention of the name Florence, Mr. Sherman started. "What was her maiden name?" he asked, tremblingly.

"Her maiden name, sir, was— But you are ill, sir ; what is it?"

"The name, the name, what was it?" Mr. Sherman cried ; "tell me her maiden name."

"Dermont, Florence Dermont. But, Mr. Sherman, what is the matter?"

Well might the farmer feel alarmed, for at the mention of the name Mr. Sherman started from his seat, but was so overcome by emotion that he sank into it again. "I might have known it," he said. "I might have known it. Luke is the very image of her, and Benjamin somehow always made me think of her."

"*You* knew her, then?" inquired the astonished farmer.

"Knew her, sir! knew her! she was my sister, my little sister Florence, my only sister."

"How?" exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "Your name is Sherman, and hers—"

"My name was Dermont until I changed it. Come with me, my friend; come and tell my sister's sons."

Mr. Edwards was a cautious man, and he endeavoured to persuade the other to make sure that there was no mistake about the matter before he mentioned it to the Clares; but his answer was that he was satisfied, the likeness of Luke to his beloved sister was proof enough.

However, before they reached the Priory Farm enough had been told by Mr. Edwards of Florence Dermont's early history to put all doubt out of the question, and on reaching the Priory Mr. Sherman seized the astonished brothers by the hands and accosted them as his nephews, the noble sons of his darling sister.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A WINDING-UP.

AS may be imagined, Mr. Sherman's announcement caused no small astonishment, and for a time it seemed strange for the Clares to look upon their old friend as a near relative. But all was made as clear as noonday. Mr. Sherman's history coincided exactly with what Mr. Edwards knew of the story of Florence Dermont's brother. Nor were other proofs wanting; some of his mother's trinkets and books had been carefully and reverently preserved by Luke, and were now brought forward and recognised by her brother.

"I thought I had no relative living," said the old man; "I thought I was alone in the world, but now I wake up to find myself uncle to two fine nephews, a good and gentle niece, and all these little folks. Thank God for it!"

It may at first sight appear strange that Luke should not have known anything of an uncle who had gone to America; and that when Mr. Sherman told him something of his history, in New York, he did not recognise in the sister Florence, of whom he spoke so lovingly, the portrait of his own mother; but it

is not strange. As we have shown, Luke was quite a child when his mother died, and his father seldom mentioned her in later life.

Mr. Edwards had often heard Mrs. Clare speak of a brother who had gone to America, and was killed in an engagement with the Indians only a short time before her marriage. How this report reached her was never discovered, but in all probability some one bearing the same name had fallen in such an engagement ; hence the mistake.

Mr. Sherman never had cause to regret the discovery he had made. He lived with his newly found relatives, beloved by them all, until at an advanced age he passed away to meet the Saviour he had so long and faithfully served.

Nearly all his property, the accumulation of many years of industry, he left to his nephews, who became the richest and most influential farmers in the neighbourhood.

If the Clares prospered in temporal affairs and increased in worldly riches, they also increased in spiritual graces, and used their greater influence in promoting the good of their fellow-men.

"I shall never despair of any one again," Mr. Edwards said to Bertha one day when

they were alone together. "I never thought there was any good in young Ben ; he was a wilful boy, and a dissipated young man, but see what he is now ! There is not a finer fellow about."

Bertha thought not—except Luke.

"You were right," continued the old farmer, "when you let Luke go on what I considered a mad journey to America. If I had hindered him, as I endeavoured, what a lot of happiness we should all have lost ! Probably Ben would never have returned to England ; Mr. Sherman would not have found his nephews out, and—"

"And Luke would not have had the satisfaction, all this time, of feeling that he had fulfilled his promise to his father, and done his duty."

"Ah ! that's just it, Bertha. It is the feeling that we have done the right, and are striving to do it still, that constitutes real happiness. All the riches in the world would be unable to make the heart feel light and happy, if there was on the conscience the burden of duties unfulfilled and opportunities neglected."

Was the old farmer right, think you, my reader ? Ah ! yes, I feel sure you do. The

veriest child must know that there is nothing that produces such happy feelings as the knowledge of having done well, whilst a sin committed or a duty neglected, in order to gain some selfish end, is sure to bring disappointment and sorrow with it. Would that we could all remember this; our lives would be happier and more useful, and more in accordance with the will of our Father who is in heaven.

One word about Luke and Benjamin Clare, and our story is finished.

For many years they lived in brotherly and Christian love. Benjamin never left the old Priory Farm; he preferred remaining there to living with Luke in the larger and somewhat grander house he built hard by. But though he lived at the Priory, Luke's house might have been considered his home, so constantly was he there.

Changes came, as they will upon all things earthly; but no change came over the affection the brothers felt for each other, for that was not of earthly origin, but had its source in love to Him who Himself is love.

veriest child must know that there is that produces such happy feelings. Knowledge of having done well, whether committed or a duty neglected, in order to some selfish end, is sure to bring repentment and sorrow with it. We could all remember this; our lives would be happier and more useful, and more in accordance with the will of our Father in heaven.

One word about Luke and Benjamin, and our story is finished.

For many years they lived in peace and Christian love. Benjamin never left Priory Farm; he preferred living with Luke in the old house to what grander house he built, though he lived at the Priory. He might have been considered a miser, constantly was he saving.

Changes came, but they were not earthly; but in the year of our Lord the hundred and twenty, the Lord Jesus Christ was born, and he himself came to dwell with them.



